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FANTASY and SCIENCE FICTION

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THIS ISSUE



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F. Orlin Tremaine

THE CREATOR
a Fantastic Tale
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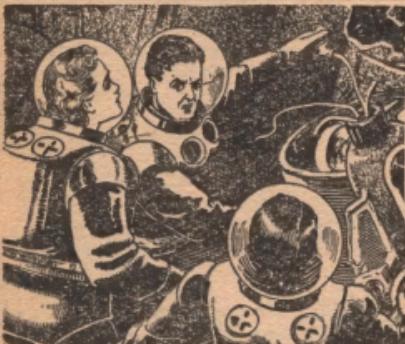


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FUTURE FANTASY and SCIENCE FICTION

Volume Three, Number Two

December, 1942



A COMPLETE NOVEL OF
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By F. Orlin Tremaine 22

Out of the world he knew, the man named John Emmett was summoned to be the builder and deliverer of a strange, unknown people. Here is a science fiction novel you will long remember, by an old-time favorite.

TWO POWERFUL NOVELETS

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An utterly strange tale of the entity that came out of the night.

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It's no laughing matter to run smack into the moral code of otherworld peoples, particularly when it's something you can understand too well!

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Robert W. Lowndes, Editor

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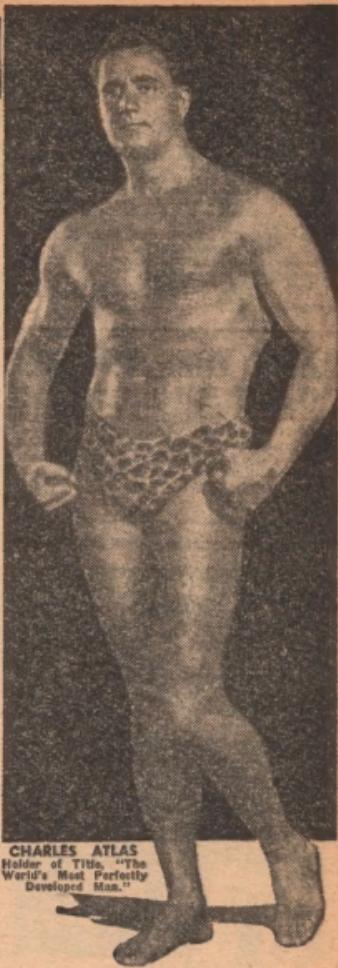
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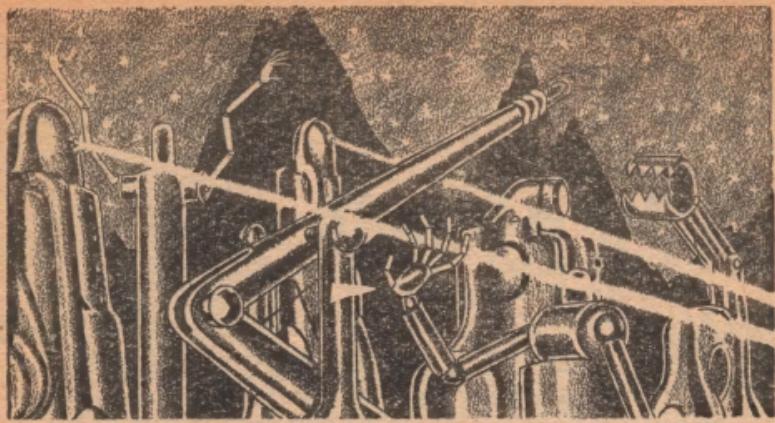
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THE KEY TO THE • DARK PLANET •

A Novelet By

Martin Pearson

CHAPTER I

PURPLE and yellow light bathed Locke's face as he lowered himself into a chair. Though there were four other people present in Academician Mallinson's study, Technician Locke was fascinated by the weird object that rested in a red plush lined metal box on the desk in the center of the room. It looked like a dumbbell, a dull black metal dumbbell whose knob ends were one a vivid yellow jewel, the other an equally luminescent purple globe.

Weirdly the thing glowed, never had the heavily built pink-cheeked spacial engineer ever seen the like. He had been on all the inner planets in his time, he had even worked on the Coldside Dam on Mercury for a year and still

he could not place the object. It was unearthly but it was not Martian, it was not Venusian, neither Northern nor Southern. And it was too finely done to be from any of the slow-people of the Jovian moons. That was the lot. Still it was unearthly.

Gradually he recognized the other persons present. Grey-haired rugged Mallinson was there, behind the desk, his hands resting lightly on a mass of papers; sturdy Meeker, astrophysicist-astronomer-navigator, in his thirties, quiet, solid, capable; Tyson, dark-haired, slender, with a slight mustache, gleaming brooding dark eyes, Locke's close friend of many years; and the girl. He recognized her from the pictures. Carlyn Landor of the auburn hair, telestar complexion, and spectacular achievements. The yellow and

Illustrated by Damon Knight



Two faint pencils of light were focussed on Tyson's head and followed him as he moved . . . apparently none were directed at Carlyn, only upon the first to break through.

Out of the night of space and brooding time came the object from distant Pluto, a strange object which defied analysis, and for which no purpose could be found. The answer to the riddle came to a man and a girl lost in the planet's eerie depths, surrounded by the titanic hulks of age-old machines!

purple rays did strange things to her hair, put odd glints in her green eyes, now fixed on the light's source.

For a brief instant there was silence. Locke squirmed, wondering who would break the ice and when. Mallinson stretched forth his hand, snapped down the cover of the metal box. The light was cut off as the thing was lost to view. Darkness. Then the glow of which light as Mallinson flicked on the ceiling bulbs.

"What is that thing?" Locke burst out. "Where'd it come from?"

The others relaxed, leaned back. Tyson flashed Locke a nod of recognition. The girl took out a cigarette case, extracted one, offered it around. Then she lit up and exhaled a puff of smoke.

"Suppose we let Mallinson tell us what this is all about?"

The Academician smiled at her.

"Thank you, I shall." He glanced briefly around.

Although they all knew each other by reputation at least, he nevertheless made introductions.

"And now to get down to the matters of interest. You were all told before you came that the Academy had a project for you. You all had expressed interest in outer-planet work, had asked for such assignments."

His hands reached out and patted the surface of the metal box an instant.

"You are aware of the return of Gardin's ship to the Earth?"

They all looked sober for an instant. They had read about it, heard about it, seen the smoking mass in the screens. Gardin's expedition to the outermost boundary of the solar system, his two-year flight to the planet Pluto had keyed up the interest of all the Earth and all the space-flying profession for all that time on the unsurpassed attempt. And then with success in his grasp, with the return journey completed, Gardin had crashed to Earth with the vision screens of three planets upon him.

ABILLION people at least must have witnessed that flaming climax. The silver ship growing into the plates, the on-rushing flames of its mighty jets pushing back against it, slowing it down for a final landing. The roar and smoke as it entered the atmosphere and then that terrible flare and buckling as the craft snapped suddenly

like tinderwood and hurtled down to a blazing grave on Earth.

"Gardin reached Pluto, we all know," the old man said. "Evidence found amidst the ashes and wreckage testify to that. What he found on Pluto we do not know save for two things. One of them was this."

He patted the box and for an instant lifted its cover. The gold and violet rays flickered out for an instant and then the lid dropped again.

"Evidently Gardin found it on the ninth planet. What it is we do not know. The two globes of light are mysteries. The light rays are harmless, apparently purposeless. Their source is unknown—possibly something concealed in the connecting handle. They seem to have negative and positive magnetic charges, a pole at each end."

"What was the other thing Gardin brought back?" Tyson asked in his low somewhat husky voice.

"A sheet of paper, evidently a memorandum jotted from his note book. It was in the box with the Plutonian object. It reads—" Here the Academician picked up a scrap of paper from his desk.

"Remember to tell Mallinson this object should be returned to Pluto with next visit for further use."

The slip of paper fell from the scientist's hand and dropped slowly to the desk. Mallinson leaned forward.

"The second expedition to Pluto is all prepared. The ship has been constructed, it is fueled and ready. It is superior to Gardin's, far faster, and it should make the trip in not more than three months each way."

"The ship is planned for a crew of four. They include a navigator, an engineer, an explorer and a recorder-cook-doctor-general assistant. The Academy has called you here to request that you four take this assignment. It will call for your patience and endurance. It may strain you to the limit, on the other hand it may prove less strenuous than some of the things you have done in the past. You may never return."

There was sucking in of breath as each of the four heard the statement. Then Locke jumped up.

"When do we leave?"

Meeker smiled and said, "I think I'll take the job."

Landor blew out a puff of smoke. "At least the Academy thinks I can cook."

Tyson was silent. He sat back in his

chair and smoked quietly. The others turned towards him. The girl opened her eyes wide and arched her brows. "Aren't you coming with us, Tyson?"

He glanced at her for an instant, an odd smile flickered over his face.

"Of course," he drawled.

THREE days and the ship slid down the last link of the loop over the asteroids. Meeker flicked the automatic control as he saw that the time left before the main haul began was short. The asteroid crossing was the first lap, and only the first lap—and yet already it was farther out than the average space-flyer ever goes. When Jupiter is a monstrous mass of unusable material surrounded by a cutting horde of satellites and meteors, there is little purpose for outer-planetary flights. But Jupiter was nowhere near. Though they were approaching its orbit, the big planet was on the other side of the sun. Saturn was in sight but far away. Beyond that the naked eye could see only the endless reaches of the stars. Pluto was there somewhere but only hours of calculation could spot it.

Meeker turned from his seat. Tyson was standing by a port with Carolyn. They were staring out at the moving lights of the asteroid belt behind them.

Meeker pressed a button, spoke into the engine-room phone.

"Locke, can you spare us a few minutes?"

"Oh sure," the voice came back. "You aren't going to shift over for a while yet, I expect. I'll be right up."

The vessel shot onwards through the emptiness of space. Long it was, far longer than anything any of them had ever handled. They had spent some time acquainting themselves with it before leaving. The store of fuel, atomic though it was, was tremendous. The water supply alone was great even though they constantly repurified it, still a large reserve was necessary. Food was concentrated but occupied another large section.

Out on this trip it was permanent half rations for everyone. They could survive. They would sleep as much as they could. And possibly lose from twenty to forty pounds each. But they were used to that also; it was routine in space; where every pound of food means more pounds of machinery and fuel.

Locke threaded his way up the various ladders from chamber to chamber. Past the

storerooms, past the sleeping quarters and air-locks and finally up into the forward control chamber.

"Well, what's up?" He waved a grease-stained hand at Meeker, bowed with an exaggerated air to Landor and sniffed at Tyson. The navigator caught the interplay and did not lose its significance. Old friends the two other men might be, but already they were working their way into serious rivalry for the attention of Carolyn. As for her, she seemed to be amused by it.

"As you know," Meeker started, "we are now clear of the asteroids and about to angle down into the plane of the ecliptic again. From here on we start our main drive."

Landor disengaged Tyson's arm. "As I understand it," she said, "we simply accelerate now to our arranged speed, turn off the engines and slide the rest of the way on inertia, as is always the case."

TYSON glared as Locke offered the girl a wad of chewing gum. Smoking was strictly forbidden, they had to find simpler vices. Locke was a fast worker, the explorer knew; he had to work overtime to make up for Locke's devastating attacks on femininity.

"Not as easy as all that, Carolyn," said Meeker glaring at the two men. They desisted their attentions and listened.

"Pluto is three billion miles from the sun. It is something like thirty times the distance of the Earth from the sun. Think that over and you will realize that it is a terribly great distance to travel. It is a tremendous hop which makes anything you may have ever done before child's play."

"And the special feature of this trip is that we must take into account something which we have not had to regard before. Hitherto you have always mentally regarded your flights to Mars and Venus as if laid out on a flat plane and requiring nothing further than gliding along fixed orbits with silent engines. But on a trip to Pluto we must deal with the sun's gravity."

"The sun's gravity!" Tyson stared. "Why?"

"At the distance that Pluto lies, the sun's hold is weak. The sun's hold on Mars and Earth is much the same, it is not of such a difference as to alter anything. But on this trip to Pluto we are partly breaking the sun's grip."

"That means that we must regard the

flight as not one laid out on the plane surface of the ecliptic in a quiet orbit, but as a constant battle upwards, up a long endless incline away from the sun."

Locke smiled. "I guessed as much from the extra supply of fuel." He looked at Carlyn to see if she appreciated his wisdom but she was paying attention to Meeker's words.

"Yes," the navigator said. "The engines will be shut off until we are past the orbit of Uranus. And then we shall be past the peak of our incline. But from here on it will be an endless acceleration, fighting against the backward drag of the sun."

Tyson was about to say something when there came a slight buzzing noise. Everyone stared at the radio panel.

The girl ran to it, sat down in the operator's chair, flicked it on and ran over the meters. Someone was trying to contact them.

Static rolled out of the sender. Roaring static, crackling waves, sharp yelps and squeals. The asteroids were a damnable wall between them and the Earth. Yet someone on Earth was trying to get through to them.

"I'll get it if it comes through at all," murmured Landor, carefully turning the dials. She threw in a switch.

"Space-ship *Lowell* calling Earth. Space-ship *Lowell* calling Earth. Come in Earth."

And again the ether crackled as she strove to pick up the message that was being sent.

For a moment they seemed to hear a voice, dimly incomprehensible through the static. They gathered around listening with desperate intensity.

"Come in Earth," called Carlyn again.

More static. Now the voice in the background, speaking slowly. They heard suddenly the words "Pluto bound" clear for an instant then the voice faded again into indistinguishability.

Locke swore but there was nothing they could do. It was tuned in right; to get reception with the asteroids in their way was a miracle anyway. The voice became clear again. They heard suddenly the name of Tyson, and again fade-out. The explorer paled and bent closer.

Then suddenly the radio cleared again. "Don't take," it said clearly and was drowned in a sudden squeal of static. Then it was off and the signal showed that the broadcast had ended.

"But what?" asked Landor. "Don't take what?"

"He mentioned Tyson," said Meeker. "It sounded like Mallinson's voice."

Tyson shrugged. "Who knows what it means? It couldn't have mattered much anyway."

Locke grabbed Meeker. "It might have been very important. Maybe something's happened or something's been found."

Meeker drummed his hands on the arms of the navigator's chair a second. "There's nothing we can do anyway. Let us carry on as before. Get ready for the new acceleration in ten minutes."

CHAPTER II

SLOWLY the ship circled the dim star-lit sphere. All eyes were glued on the surface of the farthest world. In the control room, Meeker stared at it in puzzlement and concern. Carlyn, from the commissary, watched it in wonder. Tyson and Locke together in the auxiliary low-speed engine room watched it, each silent. They were together because the work of landing the ship demanded two men at the engines but had they their own way they would have been at opposite ends of the ship. After three months, the former friends were scarcely talking to each other.

Locke had contended that Landor was not interested in Tyson and wished him to stop paying her attention. Tyson told Locke to mind his own business and that Carlyn regarded Locke as an amusing buffoon. Carlyn herself was in the position of having to keep them apart and she rather liked it.

But now all thoughts were on the face of Pluto now seen by them for the first time.

For days Pluto had been in sight as a tiny dim star—not even visible as a disc. Meeker had started worrying then, and now as he gazed down at the dull disc of the world below, his thoughts felt the need for expression. He opened the general communications panel and buzzed for attention.

"Tyson," he said, "would you say that the surface of Pluto as we now see it could possibly reflect enough light to make it visible from Earth even as the tiniest dimmest star?"

In the engine room, Tyson wrinkled his brow in thought. He turned and cast a glance through the opposite window at the sun. It was visible as a brighter star. Vis-

ible about as bright as Jupiter or perhaps Sirius on a moonless night on Earth. Out here, three billion miles away, the sun was almost as cold as any other star of the sky.

"I was wondering about that myself, Meeker," the explorer's soft voice came. "I can't see how Pluto could be visible from Earth even in the best telescope. It can't receive enough light from the sun."

"Exactly," said Meeker, "and yet we can see it."

Carlyn gazed down at the surface. She could imagine that it was as bright as a clear starlit night down there. Starlit but without the aid of the moon. She could make out vaguely in the faint blue glow, the dark peaks of mountains and sections which glared a dull white—frozen seas, frozen airs, she thought.

"Stand by to land," said the navigator. Tyson and Locke leaped to their various jet controls and made ready. Landor got into the hammock in the commissary and strapped herself in. Meeker pressed several buttons.

The ship started to incline, then slowly it swept down towards the surface.

STeadily the disc grew in immensity. Now it filled the vision plates. Then as they drew closer and the dim features of the night landscape began to loom upwards in relief instead of as flat shadows, a thin whistling became manifest.

"An atmosphere!" muttered Locke.

"Probably inert gases and maybe free hydrogen," answered Meeker from the control room. "This planet is the oddest place in the system. We must expect strange things."

Closer and closer to the surface they came and then, with a fillip that betrayed the master pilot, Meeker brought the ship around, stood it up on end, and slid it down backwards on its jets. There was a sudden hissing and a swirling of white clouds about them, a soft thump and the ship came to rest.

It stood, buried almost halfway in a white crystalline mass, a small lake of frozen air. The nose and living quarters stood out of it upright, a strange metal tower from another world.

The four made their way to the control room. The voyage was over. Technically, at that instant, Meeker's command had vanished and given way to the command of Tyson, the explorer.

Tyson stood with his back to them, star-

ing out the window. The edge of the air-lake was close at hand. He could see solid rock shining faintly under the sun-star and its companions. Farther a line of black shadows denoted mountainous masses in the distance. All else was night.

Finally Tyson turned. He gave each member of the crew a careful scrutiny. He smiled at Carlyn and gazed at the others impassively.

"We shall have an exploring party. Our time is limited and we must not allow ourselves to waste it. I shall go and Carlyn, Meeker and Locke will stay in the ship."

Locke protested the naming of the girl. Tyson frowned at him and reminded him that Landor was general assistant and besides an expert planetographer in her own right. Meeker looked worried but said nothing.

Landor and Tyson got into their space-suits. The gravity of Pluto was much the same as that of Earth for it was the same size and the same density. "Warm living Earth and frozen dead Pluto—twins!" remarked Meeker as he helped tighten the girl's equipment.

"Twins," said Carlyn adjusting her helmet. "But perhaps Pluto is not dead. Remember the thing Gardin brought back?"

Locke went over and opened a cabinet. He took down the little metal box, set it on a shelf. He opened it and the eerie yellow and purple rays mingled with the light of the ship's bulbs.

"Pluto must be dead," snapped Tyson, strangely irritated. "It is close to absolute zero out there. Life could not possibly exist!"

"But nevertheless," Locke remarked and pointed significantly at the double-gemmed object.

"It is possible that Pluto was not originally a planet of our sun," said Meeker. "It may have been torn away from some other star to wander through space until Sol captured it. In that earlier period it may have had life. Today surely it can have none."

Carlyn Landor shrugged impatiently. Her suit was on and her heating unit already in action. She was growing uncomfortable.

"Why did Gardin say we should bring it back to Pluto? We don't know. So let's stop talking and go out and find out for ourselves."

TYSON nodded and entered the inner air lock. The girl stepped in after him,

the door screwed shut, there was a brief hissing as the outer door opened. From the window Meeker and Locke saw a little shower of white specks as the air from the lock froze and fell as snow, then the two cloaked figures stepped out.

They wore wide snowshoes strapped clumsily on their boots and they clumped across the surface of lake of solid gas to make their way out onto the shore of barren rock. The lights from the ship's ports cast a faint glow out there.

The two men in the ship saw the explorers take off their snowshoes and sling them on their backs. Then they saw the flicker of Tyson's flashlight. There seemed to be a conference going on out there between the two figures.

Locke watched them impatiently. "What are they doing?" he said to Meeker. The navigator just watched.

Tyson turned towards the ship and began to flick his flashlight rhythmically. Morse code. Locke spelled it out.

"R-O-A-D," he spelled. Tyson swung his light down and shot it along the surface. Then he and Landor started off towards the dark mountains and into the starlit night of Pluto's day.

"Road?" asked Locke. "Road!" he then shouted. "They've found a road! But where does it go? I don't like this, Meeker, I don't like this at all!"

"Neither do I," stated Meeker slowly. "What did Gardin mean? What is that thing in the box?"

"What was Mallinson trying to tell us about Tyson?" added Locke as they stared out into the now still darkness of Pluto.

CHAPTER III

TYSON and Landor started up the road towards the mysterious mountains. The road was totally unexpected, it had been a great shock. There might possibly have been signs of life once, they had each thought, but to find it immediately upon reaching land...it jarred them.

The road was narrow, smooth and hard. It shone in the light of Tyson's flash a jetty polished black, it pointed straight ahead, laid out without a break or turn. Out into the unknowable gloom of darkness.

About them the dim light of the stars shone down—faint blue. Rocks and boulders loomed up darkly. Carlyn shuddered in-

wardly. Who was to know what might lurk behind such things? She had felt something of the same sensation on the dark side of Mercury or occasionally on the Moon when neither sun nor Earth was up. Here it assumed a doubly sinister aspect for the sun was up and the Earth was invisible—almost three billion miles away.

Tyson unhooked a coil of wire from his belt, passed the end of it to the girl. She hooked it on to her suit and immediately telephonic communication was established between them.

"Do you think we will encounter anything—still living?" Carlyn asked.

"No," said Tyson after a bit. "I can't imagine it surviving. This road. It may have been here for longer than there has been life on Earth. This world is dead, deader even than Luna."

He swung his flash about. On all sides of them huge boulders loomed. Patches of frozen white air, a bit of ice hanging in some weird icicle form, a yellow patch of some gas now solid in the terrible all-enveloping cold.

Ahead the road seemed to pass through a narrow canyon in cliff-like mountains. The light shone for a way on a straight black path between monstrous high walls.

"That thing of Gardin's. Where could he have gotten it?" Carlyn asked again the question which had been bothering all the party from the start.

They had entered the defile in the range. Above them hung steep precipices of the mountain—towering many hundreds of feet up.

"We may find out at the end of this road," Tyson said, flashing his light along the smooth walls. "It must lead somewhere, you know."

They walked on a pace, came to the end of the defile. Tyson stopped.

"Did you realize that this cut in the cliffs was artificial? It must have been made when the road was built."

The girl looked back. The thought overwhelmed her. What sort of civilization had Pluto evolved?

Tyson remarked slowly. "I think we are at the end of the road now." Carlyn turned back. She unhooked her own flash and it joined the man's in swinging about.

The road ended a few feet ahead. Shadows loomed before them. The flashes shone from smooth surfaces grouped about. Before them seemed a forest of shadows.

They started forward slowly. Two thin dark columns rose at the end of the road. As they passed them, they heard a click in the thin inert air. Instantly a faint glow began to gather about the scene. The two explorers stopped dead and stood waiting.

The glow grew. It seemed as a faint luminescent fog rolling up from the surface. It was strictly limited in its field for it did not extend to the road. It stopped where the path began. It seemed to extend upwards the height of the highest column and then to dwindle out. It hung in the air like a mist.

The scene before them was visible now as on a cloudy winter day.

The dark columns, the strange shapes stood now revealed. Black shining jet was their substance, like the road. But their shapes were those of machines. Great masses of wheels and cogs, levers, rods, axles, walking-beams. Each unit seemed ponderous and powerful. They stood in order, row on row and their shapes were incomprehensible and their purposes unknown.

The two stared at them in wonder not daring to move. But there was no sign of action or life.

"We must have passed some invisible beam between those columns," said Carlyn.

Tyson stood silently as in thought. Finally he waved a hand and started forward. Carlyn followed, a little behind him.

Past several of the metal masses they walked, then past two more columns. Another click sounded in the thin air. They both turned. No new light had been added, nothing had changed. Tyson shrugged and started forward again. Carlyn followed, wondering what had happened.

On they went past innumerable masses of machinery. A great many, Carlyn noted with a shudder, seemed to be on the order of small movable units, standing motionless on a dozen wheels and possessed of several small crane-like arms.

"Did you notice that there are no seats or places for controls on any of these machines?" she remarked to Tyson. The man gave no evidence of having heard her. He simply walked freely onwards.

Carlyn stared at Tyson's back as she followed after him. Suddenly she noted that the light seemed to alter slightly as he moved. This luminous fog had not allowed any shadows or highlights previously. She watched him carefully and now noted what

the cause of this was. She drew in her breath in shock.

Two faint pencils of light were focussed on the explorer's head and followed him as he moved!

LANDOR turned, traced them to the tops of the columns which had last clicked. There were apparently no beams directed on her, only upon the first to break through.

"Tyson!" she cried. "Stop and look!"

But he seemed not to hear her. He continued to stride forward towards the center of the silent army of machinery. The girl ran up to him, grasped his arm. He shook her off, muttered something, walked on.

Carlyn walked alongside of him. She did not know what had happened. So long as nothing affected her, she would watch and see. It might be that Tyson would shake loose from the strange influence or it might be that he was learning something and did not dare risk the contact by speaking to her.

Onward they went past more mechanisms and then they came to what seemed a central place. It was perfectly circular and cleared of machinery. They walked across it and then both stopped as they saw the thing that was on the opposite side of the circle.

It was a great black statue, a statue of a huge being, manlike in shape, sitting upon a massive throne and staring emptily ahead. Its face bore four eyes set in two pairs, its mouth was small and proper but nose it had none. The figure was broad-shouldered, it had four arms. The uppermost pair were brawny and powerful, the lower two were tiny and puny and folded meekly in its lap. Its leg seemed to melt together until only one blocky leg rested on the pedestal upon which the whole statue sat.

Its two large arms were each flexed outwards. The fingers and hands were upwards, curved as if to hold something. In its left hand there rested an object shaped like a dumbbell.

Landor gasped as she recognized it. It was a replica of the thing Gardin had found save that it emanated no light. It was a dead jetty black even as was the statue. She glanced at the right hand but where there should have been another object, there was none. The right hand was empty.

Had Gardin's object been taken from the

hand of this incredibly ancient memorial of a forgotten race? And why?

Tyson stopped with Carlyn and stared at the statue also. He said nothing. The girl looked and noted suddenly that the rays from the columns had vanished.

"Tyson," she cried, "are you all right? Those rays are gone. Did they do anything to you?"

Tyson heard her for he turned and stared at her long. His dark eyes pierced her through from behind the transparency of his helmet.

"Carlyn," he said slowly, "you do care for me, don't you?"

The girl was stunned. Why did he choose now to start talking love? She repeated the first question:

"Tyson, are you all right?"

"But you must care for me," he said as if not hearing her. "You followed me to my throne. You attend me."

"To—to your throne?" Carlyn gasped in horror. "Tyson what has happened to you? What are you talking about?"

Tyson suddenly thrust out a gloved hand, grasped her arm. "You will stay with me. I feel the power. This is to be my throne, I know it, I feel it. Is that not my statue that sits there? You will stay. We shall control all the planet and the worlds of the cosmos shall bow to us. This I know. The lights told it to me. I believe them."

"Tyson," she cried again, "you've been hypnotized! Snap out of it. Wake up, Tyson, this is madness!"

She tried to wrench her arm free but his grip tightened. He started forward, dragging her with him, oblivious to her appeals and struggles.

"The time has come again. I shall take it all."

He ascended the incline to the foot of the statue. He reached over to the right hand of the figure and seemed to snatch futilely just above its open palm. But there was nothing there. He seemed confused. For an instant his grip wavered.

Carlyn wrenched herself free, ran down the incline to surface facing the statue. She turned and stared in horror at Tyson, wavering up there, standing before the seated figure as if in confusion and illness. She thought he was going to fall but he suddenly snatched forward again and picked up the black object from the image's left hand.

There was a sudden flash and then the fog vanished. Darkness had suddenly fallen

again upon the scene. Carlyn recovered from the shock of the plunge into night and reached for her flashlight.

But before she could put it on, a faint glow again commenced. It was a red glow, the glow of fire or blood. A faint luminous ruddy mist waved and moved amongst the columns of black machines. And in the crimson light she saw the figure of Tyson standing at the foot of the statue holding the black object in his hand high above his head. He seemed mouthing something but she could not hear for the cord of the communications had been snapped. There was a sudden jarring noise. Carlyn saw a slight tremor pass through the ranks of machinery and she knew that somehow the taking of the black dumbbell had activated the vast field of engines.

SHE turned and fled wildly the way they had come. All about her the machines flexed and quivered. Power surged through their coils again; after an aeon of aeons, the works of Pluto were operating. And in the control of an obsessed man!

Carlyn reached the edge of the road through the escarpment. And as she raced along it, the red fog flowed past her and the ranks of the machines began to roll slowly behind her. And Tyson ran in their lead holding the black object high above his head.

CHAPTER IV

LOKE had fidgeted ever since the explorers had left. He spent most of his time wandering back and forth from the air-lock to the controls staring out of the ports. Outside the scene remained the same. Meeker was reclining in a hammock and watching him with an amused smile.

"Why all the restlessness? Your prowling about here isn't going to do them any good or make them come back any sooner."

"Yeh, but I don't like the thought of Carlyn being out there alone with that Tyson. The man's a wolf, I tell you. I've seen him chasing girls in Nuiorck and Venusity and he's dangerous," Locke yelped at Meeker.

"Don't get worried. Carlyn can take care of herself. And from what I hear, you're a bit of a wolf yourself. You and Tyson have chased many a girl together and I

hear this always happens. Why don't you get wise?"

Locke stood by the window and fumed. "This time it's different. And anyway Tyson always loses his head with a girl."

"You probably say that to all the girls," laughed Meeker rolling over. He was the only one who had known Landor before this trip and he had confidence in her ability to out-fox any wolf.

Locke shrugged it off and stared towards the dark horizon where the mountains cut off the view. Outside only the faint starlight illuminated the scene.

Locke mused on the planet after a while. A road was out there according to the flashed message. That might lead to all sorts of things. He stood at the port a long time staring into the darkness.

How long he stared he did not know but suddenly his thoughts were interrupted. Something had changed out there. He stared and realized that a faint white glow was emanating from behind the mountains.

He called Meeker and when the navigator had joined him, pointed it out. Meeker whistled and stared. He could not figure it out.

"That was the direction Tyson and Landor took," he remarked. "Towards the mountains."

"It must have been there the road leads," the technician added. "I don't like this."

"Neither do I but there's no cause for excitement." Meeker remained calm.

"How do we know? What does it mean? It may mean something awful, it might mean a fire or disaster." Locke became excited.

"A fire? On this world?" laughed Meeker. "Never! But we have no right to go after them unless we are certain something's wrong."

"Ah, then you think something may be wrong!" shouted Locke.

Meeker frowned an instant. "Still we shouldn't leave the ship."

Locke paced back and forth. He argued with Meeker about letting him go after them. Meeker refused to allow him to go alone.

"What good could you do alone if they had trouble?" he argued.

Finally his own anxiety got the better of him. He sought a compromise. He agreed that they should both get into space-suits and be ready to rush out the instant they were sure something was wrong.

They did this. Then they stood by the air-lock door and stared out towards the white glow.

Suddenly it snapped out.

"It's gone!" shouted Locke.

"Look!" yelled Meeker immediately afterwards and pointed with his gloved hand.

The sky behind the mountains was now glowing a sinister dull red.

Without further talk they opened the outer door and leaped down onto the surface of the lake of frozen gas. Their snow-shoes caught them and they stomped across it.

A line of red was now cleaving the mountains. They eyed it anxiously as they reached the shore and found the strange road. Meeker bent down and laid his hand on the road just before removing his snowshoes. His hand in contact with the ground, he felt a sudden vibration.

It was a steady rumbling, still far away, but there. As if a fleet of trucks were rolling slowly along that road.

Locke flashed his light ahead. Then miraculously from way off in the darkness there came an answering flicker.

"Someone!" shouted Meeker. "Someone's coming this way!"

Almost immediately afterwards the faint red glow that had cut the mountains began to gather on their side. They saw the slopes light up a dull red. They saw the red glow bring out the shapes of the boulders and rocks about them.

And outlined against the red background of the horizon they saw the dark silhouette of Carlyn Landor running towards them and behind her the dark shadows of moving monsters!

The two men ran towards her pulling their guns. Soon Carlyn came down the road. She was shouting to them to run but they could not hear her.

She reached them, stumbling into Meeker's arms. Meeker held her up and fired into the pursuing mass. Locke blazed away.

Great explosions shook the ranks of their pursuers. The guns the two men used were of the explosive variety, firing small pellets of activated osmium. For an instant the machines behind them retained their file and order and then all was chaos. Parts flew about and great spurts of vapor and gas whirled as the suddenly released heat affected the frozen matter of Pluto.

Then the three made their way back to the bank of the gas lake, Meeker fastened

the girl's snowshoes and the two men, holding her between them, got back to the ship.

Once inside and divested of their space garments, Carlyn recovered most of her equilibrium. She sat now on Meeker's hammock and told the two what had happened.

Meeker strode back and forth trying to work out the problem.

"Somehow or other those rays from the columns must have sent a fixation message into Tyson's mind. Waves directed along the wavelength of thought could do it. And if the long-dead inhabitants of Pluto had set an automatic trap that would snap it on the brain of the first living thing to cross into the machine park, it would have the effect that you describe. You say Tyson saw the statue on the throne as that of himself. That proves it. The hypnosis made him believe he was one of the ancient Plutonians. Yet he still associated himself with his past as well. It's odd."

"It's ghastly," said Locke. "Now he has control of all the machines. And until he starves to death inside his space-suit he can stop us from saving him."

"Worse still," added Landor. "Before he will starve to death, he will try to capture the space-ship and get the food supply."

As if to illustrate her words, there came a thud on the outer hull and then another.

THHEY dashed to the view-ports. Outside, separated only by the surface of the lake of gas, was arrayed a mass of machines, the ones with the dozen wheels and the crane-like arms. And Tyson in his space-suit, still holding the black dumbbell, waving. The red glow was all about and everything was bathed in it.

The three in the ship stared out. Tyson had called their attention by throwing rocks. But that could not harm the ship. How could Tyson get at them?

"Only he can cross the gas," Meeker stated. "The machines would sink."

"Then he can't get at us?" asked Locke.

"Look, he's going to signal," and the girl pointed.

Sure enough, Tyson was unhooking his flashlight. Then he flickered it.

"Surrender," Locke read.

"Never," answered Meeker for them all. "We'll wait and see what he does next."

Tyson evidently did not waste time. He waved the black dumbbell and one of the machines rolled forward. It reached the

surface of the lake of frozen gas and pushed on to it. For an instant the solidified surface held it and then, with a crack, opened, and the machine sank down into it, waving its cranes futilely until the gases closed over it again.

Tyson leaped up and down in fury. Again he waved his dumbbell object. Now the smaller machines cleared a path and a longer machine rolled up to the lake shore. From a long slung base, it extended a long telescopic arm out across the treacherous surface and rested it against the rim of the air-lock door.

Another machine like it came up to it and repeated the process. Now there were two neat tracks stretching across the frozen surface to the metal tower that was the ship.

Tyson mounted one of the crane-armed things and rode across his improvised bridge to the air-lock.

The three inside could hear him fumbling with the outer controls. They dashed down to the lock's inner entrance.

"Don't use your guns," shouted Meeker. "They'll wreck the ship! Use sticks, clubs, throw things at them if they get though. I don't think Tyson will kill us if we don't kill him!"

They heard the outer air-lock door open. They heard the rumble of wheels as the small machine rolled in and they saw the indicators point to the outer door as shut and the air as entering the lock.

In a few seconds, the inner door handle turned. They had piled everything they could against it. The door pushed and stopped.

They heard Tyson's voice. "Don't try to stop me. I am the ruler of the machines."

A little rumble and the door began to unscrew in spite of the barriers. It slowly opened and the machine forced its way in. Behind it Tyson stepped over the barriers.

Locke hurled something at him. It broke over his helmet. Tyson frowned and directed his machine towards Locke with a wave of the black dumbbell.

Locke ran as the machine started after him. Meeker dashed in and tried to batter the thing with the legs of a chair. His efforts were of no avail.

As the Plutonian machine turned after him, he too fled and Carlyn after him. Up into the control room, up at the top of the vessel.

They tried to bar the entrance to that but it had the same lack of effect against

the strength of the machine as the air-lock door. The entrance was forced and Tyson entered, followed by his servant, the wheeled mechanism.

Tyson again demanded they surrender and he would protect them. Locke shouted: "Never! You're crazy! We might as well die now as die here later!"

Tyson started after him, then caught sight of Carolyn backed up against the shelves at one wall of the chamber.

"Carolyn," he said, "You will rule Pluto with me. You must not oppose me!"

"No!" cried the girl. "Tyson, you must come out of it. This is madness!"

Tyson scowled. "You too?" he said as if aware for the first time that she was also against him.

HE waved a hand in fury. The Plutonian machine turned and started towards Carolyn waving its crane-like arms wildly.

The girl screamed and picked up a book from the shelf and threw it. It bounced harmlessly off the monster and it continued towards her. She grabbed other things, then suddenly her hand fell on Gardin's metal box.

She knocked it over. It opened and the gemmed dumbbell fell out. She swung it over her head to throw it...

For an instant everything in the room was still as if frozen. All eyes were on the two spheres of light now pulsing in her hand.

The machine had stopped, had turned, had seized Tyson and was pinning him against a wall.

Tyson, too, had a look of utter astonishment. As if he did not know where he was or what had happened. And he had dropped the black dumbbell.

"Stop!" shouted Meeker suddenly. "Carolyn, lower your arm!"

The girl dropped her arm but did not let go of Gardin's object.

The machine backed up, let go of Tyson and folded its arms.

The explorer staggered, regained his balance.

"Where am I? What's all this?" he gasped, trying to brush his hand against his brow and being thwarted by the visor of his helmet.

"Carolyn! The thing you hold controls the machines! You have the key to all Pluto!" Meeker ran over to the girl who

was leaning against the wall overcome with the strain.

Locke ran to Tyson and helped him take off his helmet. Then he explained briefly what had happened.

The machine remained quiet in the center of the room.

Carolyn recovered her balance. She stared at the window. Suddenly she walked over to it and all the rest went with her.

Outside, the red glow had vanished. A clear white glow was over all the scene. Everything glowed, rocks, ground, grouped silent machines, mountains, road. The planet was lighted, lighted almost as bright as a cloudy day on Earth.

"This explains why we can see Pluto from Earth," Meeker said suddenly. "It must be like this when the dumbbell you hold, Carolyn dear, is activated."

"Yes," Tyson added. "I seem to remember now. The black object controls the machines and the desire and fact of power. The other controls light and balance. That must be why Gardin meant for it to be brought back. It is the key to this planet. The inhabitants who built all this must have been very great before their world grew cold."

Locke nudged Tyson. They both looked at Meeker and Landor who were arm in arm and staring out at the scene.

"And he was calling me a wolf," he remarked bitterly to Tyson.

Carolyn overheard him, turned, laughed.

"Why we were engaged before the trip began." She kissed the astronomer-navigator.

Locke stared. He held out his hand to Tyson.

"Never again. Never again!" he said. The explorer shook.

"There's only one more thing that's a puzzle," said Locke afterwards. "What was Mallinson trying to tell us?"

They found out when they returned to Earth after one of the most successful expeditions of all time. Mallinson laughed long and heartily when they told him of their hours of concern over his words. The mention of Tyson was among the list of all their names read out to them. What he had read was a formal farewell message from the Academy. His closing line, which he had thrown in as an afterthought, the enigmatic warning which started with "Don't take," he admitted sheepishly should have ended with "any wooden nickels."

A LEADER FOR ★ KORCIN ★

By F. Orlin Tremaine



An absorbing Novel of one who was summoned from our Earth to be the planner and the director for the building of a new world — by one of Science Fiction's favorites!



CHAPTER I

THE statement which follows was sworn to by John Emmett, of Dresser Junction, Minnesota, on January 4th, 1939, before me at my home. (Signed) Edward Wales, Justice of the Peace.

Attested by: (Mts) Mary Wales
Oscar Johnson
Dr Eric Holmes*

I, John Emmett, know only the facts, not the reasons for them, or the conclusions which may be reached by any possible scientific investigators. There, on that glass slide on the table is my only proof. I've mounted it so that it may be seen under the microscope. Your naked eye can see what appears to be a tiny flake of silvery powder when the light glints on it—like a speck. You may also see a hint of red color beside it.

The red is a brilliant uniform I wore for seven years! The silver speck is a collar of platinum which was riveted on my neck!

Yes, there is one further proof. In my safe is a cube of pure platinum, eight inches square. Although I have made no attempt to sell it, I believe it represents a fair-sized fortune. That is my reward for seven years of work well done.

All these items were magnified ten thousand diameters, to permit me to retain the first two as souvenirs, and the third as actual recompense. You may well imagine the mountain of pure metal which was paid to me in Korsin.

Now look through my microscope. Of course it doesn't give you the full detail of etching on the collar, but you can see that it is a circlet, and if your eyes are keen

* Dr. Holmes, after careful examination, gave his opinion that the above-mentioned John Emmett appears to be mentally and physically sound.—E. W.

you can see that it is joined at one side.** Also you can see the outlines of a tiny, scarlet coat and trousers. I've placed the boots below them on the glass.

You must take my word for the excellent tailoring, and for the fact that it was the first uniform ever made in Korsin; and you may well wonder when I say that, though I wore it for seven years, the cloth is like new. Whenever it was torn it was rewoven so skilfully that—but let's start at the beginning.

On the morning of January 3rd, 1939—Yes, I realize what I'm saying—January 3rd, 1939, I was preparing to return to the High School where you know I teach—or did teach—physics and chemistry. The holidays were over. But my head ached intolerably and I poured out a thimbleful of cognac, hoping it would ease my distress sufficiently to enable me to return to classes.

I had sipped perhaps half of it before I noticed that it had become the size of a mug, that my feet were swinging free of the floor, and that my shoulders were much closer to the table surface than usual.

My head had become one tremendous throbbing pain, and this perhaps lessened any feeling of surprise.

I drank deeply from the huge thimble; it must have contained a full pint of the brandy! I felt as if I were being compressed under unbelievable pressure. (And I was!) My lungs struggled for air; I gulped great lungfuls realizing at the same time some of the tortures of the wrack of the Inquisition.

**All four witnesses were able to make out the circlet as described by Emmett. Oscar Johnson, whose eyesight is unusual, claims he could make out the juncture of the metal.



Illustration by Damon Knight

There was no room in my thoughts for brandy, now. My hands gripped the sides of the chair and I compressed my lips in agony. I remember the surprise I felt when I had to actually *reach* to both sides of the chair. My head was below the level of the table. Voices were ringing in my ears, soft voices, strident voices, clamoring. Then the silence of darkness and agony. I must have fainted.

After awhile the voices came again. I sat up, then got to my feet in panic. I had been lying on a vast plain, a rough mesh of crisscross, ropelike girders perhaps two feet thick; there were deep holes beneath the two foot square spaces they formed. By walking carefully I was able to move along one of these girders, but it grew larger as I walked. Now it was three feet in diameter; now four feet, and the rope-like antennae which protruded from it became as formidable as tree-trunks. Still I fought my way along the inexplicable surface.

Now I know that I was crossing the woven cloth upholstery of the seat of my chair—but I didn't know it then. My thoughts were too scattered to build my experience into sane logic.

My progress became slower and more labored. I had to climb the huge cross-girders, which by now had assumed the size of eight-foot sewer conduits. It was inevitable that I would sink down exhausted eventually; and just as inevitable that as these hempen girders grew I would slip down into a crevice in one of them. I did, and slept.

I AWOKE on a beach of silver sand. I mean just that. Water (it was H₂O) of an opalescent sheen lapped along the shore of the beach on which I rested. And the sand was flaky grains of silvery metal. The sun—or A sun—shone with a greenish tinge to its warming rays, adding a touch of magic to the landscape. My eyes were riveted to it all in sudden wonder. Automatically I got to my feet, then looked about me, embarrassed. I was as naked as a newborn babe!

How long I had slept in the direct rays of the sun I don't know, but I felt no burn. My skin had assumed a golden tan, really golden. But my muscles felt no stiffness when I flexed them. My headache had disappeared. I felt fresh and strong though very hungry.

My first feeling of relief at seeing no sign of human habitation about my naked self turned to worry as to whether I could find men who in turn could provide food, clothing, and shelter. With this thought uppermost, I started walking slowly along the beach, keeping my eyes on bushes toward which I might plunge for modesty's sake, but hoping nevertheless for some sign of a building.

What I would do when I actually made the hoped for—and dreaded—contact I had not the haziest idea. It was perfectly obvious that I had undergone some momentarily inexplicable vibratory miracle. The very nature of the sand on the beach proved that it was not of the earth. The sun and the sea were of a different basic nature. Yet there was a sun! The loss of my clothes was a further indication of vibratory shift—for I had still worn them as I walked the hempen girders of the upholstery.

There was nothing to indicate that any race comparable to man existed in this opalescent earth! Certainly there was no reason to believe I held the power of intelligible communication at first sight. Hope held however, when reason failed to support it, and I went on.

Lost in thought, I failed to notice how the beach widened, until there was a full half-mile of silver sand between the water and the yellowish green vegetation; when voices reached me I was isolated halfway between sea and green leaves! Furthermore the voices seemed to come from all four directions. And they did.

My heart skipped a few beats in that crucial moment of decision. Upright figures moved toward me from all directions in a narrowing circle. It was only too obvious that while I thought I was seeking the inhabitants, they had also been seeking, or at least surrounding, me.

The figures drew closer. They looked human. Also they appeared to be as naked as I. Drawing a deep breath, I determined to be casual about my undress regardless. It was becoming obvious that the narrowing circle was comprised of men, whose skin was as golden as mine, and as devoid of clothing.

But there was another moment of panic as I realized the assembling crowd included both men and women! Stalwart, athletic men; and gorgeously feminine girls. There must have been fifty figures in the circle

(which by now had a radius of not more than 100 feet) and not one of them appeared to be over twenty-one years of age.

Even then I noticed that many of them wore metal collars about their necks, silver collars, and I wondered about it.

"Hello," I said, foolishly. I had to do or say something.

"Hello," the fifty people said in return—almost in unison. I was so frightened at the response that I could only wonder if they echoed everything they heard.

"Were you looking for me?" I asked, feeling more silly than before.

"We have found you." Only one of them answered this time, a fine young looking chap. Might have been fresh out of Eton if he'd been clothed.

"So it appears," I said, "but how, when and where did you learn English?"

"We searched your brain while you slept, and learned it," the man reassured me, smiling.

"But," I objected, "that sounds like the utmost advance of dreamed-of machinery and you show no evidence of a machine age."

"We have no machines," he answered. "Until we read your brain we had no knowledge of machinery other than tools. Our accomplishments, such as they are, have been mental."

I was regaining my composure slowly, forgetting my embarrassment in the presence of people who apparently knew none.

"Then," I ventured, "you must even have known how I would feel about meeting you when I awoke."

"Yes, John," he said, "we did. It, too, was a revelation of thought. Such an idea had never occurred to us before. It is not too sound. But recognizing that you would be embarrassed we encircled you. The feeling is passing away now, is it not?"

"Why," I said, startled, "I'd forgotten all about it!"

"That is good, John. Now let me introduce myself. I am Der Koob, and these people comprise what you might call a welcoming committee. You see we knew you were coming, though I perceive that you did not." Der Koob extended his hand and I took it gladly.

The company had gathered close about me by now and listened interestedly to our conversation. I had forgotten that this was

a strange world, for the moment, and felt only that I had found friends.

At the moment there appeared nothing else to be said, and a young girl who wore no collar, laughingly slid her hand into mine, saying:

"Come now. There's a long walk ahead, and you are hungry." I glanced at her in surprise.

"You, too, mastered English as I slept?"

She laughed again, a rippling, happy laugh. A surge of embarrassment swept over me as I realized that I was staring at her.

She pressed my arm understandingly.

"You mustn't mind," she said. "We were made to be looked at. And after all the girls on your bathing beaches are nearly as bold as we are in your eyes."

We started walking slowly along the beach, Der Koob on my right, Eltil Raey still holding my left hand in hers. The balance of the welcoming committee strung out in a little column behind us.

"Did you learn about them while I slept, too?" I asked.

Eltil's eyebrows raised, "Of course," she said. "We traced all your past thoughts, and your courses in physics and chemistry as well," as if that completed the explanation.

Der Koob said: "Your past thoughts we traced, but of course that does not help us with the big problem which you have not, as yet, solved."

"The big problem?" I asked.

"Yes. Of course you know there had to be a reason for us to seek you out of the vastness of your world."

"Of course," I said, feeling it was about time I understood something.

"And I'm glad you're here," Eltil said brightly, in her sweet, soprano voice, "because I'll get to wear my feathers at your formal reception tonight."

"Yes, of course you will," I said. Der Koob smiled, and as his twinkling eyes met mine I winked at him. Then he patted my shoulder, and I knew him for my first friend.

We had covered nearly a mile of the silver beach before we turned inland toward a fair-sized settlement built of logs, and apparently chinked and held together by silvery metal like the sand on the beach. I wondered at the use of metal, but suspected I'd have plenty of time to learn the secrets of this world without displaying

too much ignorance through my questions. So I kept still.

AS we neared the buildings, the land sloped gradually upward. The settlement itself stood probably fifty feet above sea level. And tufts of grass appeared, grew thicker; finally, as we reached the first structures they became foot-high turf. Feet had worn paths through the yellowish-green blades of coarse grass, and the paths appeared like silver ribbons, although I imagined somehow that the powdered metal was not as bright as that on the beach. Perhaps it was mixed with some other element.

"We will stop here, John," Der Koob told me as we rounded the corner of this first building. "You will shake hands with the members of the committee before we enter."

There followed five minutes of handshaking and introductions, although I remembered only three names out of the crowd. In each case there was a definite reason in my mind. The first was Lan Gero, a man whose twinkling eyes and frank face looked at me from above the body of a Greek god. His handshake was firm, and in the days to follow I had reason to be glad I had met him. The second name I remembered was Tol Erba whose work was science; I gained an instant impression that somewhere in his makeup lurked jealousy of my presence in his world. Both of these men wore collars.

The third name I remembered was Tae Nerle. She looked eighteen, but an indefinable air of confident mastery about her belied her looks. Her body was a glorious representation of Korcin's womanhood. Long, graceful, slender legs; arms which seemed to move little, yet did move with never a shadow of awkwardness. She, too, wore a collar, but hers was a plain band of polished metal without a scratch or an inscription. I noticed, because it was different from the others. Her handshake was firm, though very feminine, and her eyes told me that she was a friend whenever I might need one. "I'm very glad you're here, John Emmett," she said, and the little added pressure of her hand said it was so.

Koob turned and mounted the single silvery step at the entrance to the log building. I followed, with Eltil still clinging to my hand. Inside the walls the light was dim, but not so dim as to hide the fact that

the walls, ceilings and floors were lined with silver like a jewel-box.

Doors opened on three sides of the long hallway. At the left was a room twenty feet long and fifteen wide, a silver room containing three box-like frames in a row along the inner wall. These frames were of silver also, about a foot high, and the size and shape of a double bed. Inside each framework was what appeared to be a feather-bed mounded high in the middle, and several coverings were folded neatly at the foot, or room end, of the frame. I might not have noticed except for the strange fact that these coverings seemed to be woven of feathers.

Along the opposite wall, between the windows, were three corresponding sets of shelves, obviously to serve as dressers. There were no mirrors, and no chairs.

"Three beds," I remarked, for want of anything better to say.

"Yes, John," Koob answered seriously. "I remain with you as guide, interpreter, and instructor as well as pupil. Eltil remains in your home as companion, hostess, and housekeeper until you choose otherwise."

"Oh!" I said, and noticed that Eltil had slipped out of the room. We went on. The main room at the end of the hall was twenty feet square. It was strewn with featherery blankets, and feathery pillows. There was a long low table in the center, and long benches, perhaps six inches high (these were of wood) along both sides.

"Here council will meet to avert catastrophe through you," Der Koob informed me. "You will rest again tonight after the reception. Tomorrow we will lay the problem before you. I know you are hungry. Eltil will have your meal ready very soon. Come."

We entered the third room, from the hallway. It completed the house. It, like the bedroom, was fifteen by twenty feet in size. In one end was a silver stove, the oven below, an open firepit above. A grill over the flames served as a cooking surface, and three feet above the grill a huge cone-shaped chimney opening cupped the smoke and carried it up the chimney. Rather a crude arrangement from our earthly standpoint, but the aroma of cooking food killed any speculation I might otherwise have entertained on that point.

I felt faint, and sat down on a six-inch

bench beside a small, low table at the opposite end from the stove.

ALL ready," Eltil called cheerily, and I marveled again at the unbelievable mastery of English! She ran back and forth between stove and table carrying hot dishes and chattering all the time. "We have *brigle* tonight in honor of your coming, John—and it will be my first taste of it!"

"*Brigle*," Koob explained, "is comparable to your pheasant. It is extremely rare, though we are undertaking to propagate it and hope to renew the wild stock inside of a few years."

The *brigle* was delicious, and I was hungry. Accompanied by a gruel, comparable to ground rice boiled, and seasoned with a type of native pepper they called "*Sanstone*" it more than made up for the hours of hunger.

Three men whose skin was of a greenish cast, entered while we ate, and deposited Koob's and Eltil's personal effects in the bedroom. They also brought some toilet articles, and equipment for me. The men wore ankle rings linked by short chains, and they were followed by a young fellow with a long, pointed spear. He spoke pleasantly to Koob while the green men deposited their burdens and departed again, silently.

"Slaves," Koob said in answer to my unspoken question. "Prisoners of war. But you'll hear more of that tomorrow."

After the satisfying repast, Koob led me into the main room and we lay down on pillows in one corner, facing each other. The air was balmy and there was no need for covers. He smiled at me as he saw my eyes trying to absorb as much of the detail of the surrounding craftsmanship as possible.

"John," he said, "we of the committee, learned a great deal while you slept. We found clear, concise thought channels and followed them. It was as if we toured your magic world of machines.

"But you, thrust suddenly amongst us, are at a disadvantage. Tonight you will be received by Council, and by the populace in a grand reception, typical of our people. It seems to me that you should know something of our society, and of our social customs, if you are to appear to best advantage.

"Fortunately, I am able to take your viewpoint into consideration so as to make clear the points of similarity and the points of differentiation. Our greatest advances have been in telepathic communication. Where you have built lie-detectors, and radio, we have learned to read each others' thought waves, and even to communicate considerable distances through concentration. But of that later.

"Our community life in Korcin is democratic in the extreme. There is no crime, except perhaps that committed in bursts of temper which is rare. Crime cannot go undetected when every man you meet knows what you are thinking. For the same reason, it is impossible for a girl to deceive a man, or a man a girl. And for the same reason again, the clearest thinking brains move forward to council. There can be no such thing as an incompetent in public office.

"Socially, this knowledge has had definite effects on our custom. Clothes as you have known them could serve no purpose of concealment when our thoughts are open books, could they?"

"No, Der, I don't believe they could," I said, slowly. "Camouflage would be impossible."

"Not impossible, perhaps, for an intelligent man," he said, "but extremely unlikely, and certainly not sustainable indefinitely.

BUT socially, our family units are inviolable. They are the foundation stone of our civilization, and we are proud of them and proud of our lineage lines which trace back seventy-two centuries as you figure time.

"Children until the age of sixteen are under absolute parental discipline. They are trained in etiquette, custom, lineage and national history. They are drilled in the essentials of some craft regardless of parental position. There is little shirking of studies, lest the most humiliating degradation be visited upon them.

"At the age of twelve, platinum arm bands, identification bands, are riveted on the arms of every boy and girl. This serves a double purpose. They are not free to think of mating until the bands are removed; and must not be considered in that connection. Neither must they be seen outside the study halls during sessions except on physicians' orders. If examinations are

satisfactorily passed during the sixteenth year, the arm bands are struck off on the sixteenth birthday. But if a child of either sex fails, he or she is sentenced to wear that band of childhood until the eighteenth birthday! Such humiliation is seldom earned.

"At sixteen, education complete, girls are subject to suitors' attentions. And boys are permitted to seek girls' favors. But girls are permitted to carry knives if they wish, and are perfectly free to repulse, or fight off unwelcome suitors. Killing an unwelcome suitor is not a crime. Hence, a slight repulse is usually sufficient to send an amorous lad elsewhere. On the other hand, if a boy is able to force his attentions on a girl and she submits, she still becomes his mate as irrevocably as the wearing quality of our platinum mating collars.

"Once a girl accepts a suitor, her collar is forged on her neck, and his is riveted on his. Both are taboo to any other living being so long as they both shall live. The punishment for adultery is death without question. We have no illegitimacy in Korcin!"

"There is one recognition granted to women for their protection which is usually deserved. If a girl repulses every suitor who seeks her hand during the fourteen years from 1 to 30, she is entitled to a polished collar which makes her as unapproachable as if she were mated. She retains the right, however, to seek any collarless male if she desires him, and her suit becomes almost a command. When she attains her plain collar she is admitted to Council without question, and is considered to have attained certain occult powers. Tae Nerle, whom you met tonight, wears a plain collar. She is 34 years of age.

"You undoubtedly noticed how youthful we all appear. That is one of the evolutionary developments of our race. From the time we attain maturity, at eighteen years, until we have attained an age of sixty, we neither age nor change except for an accretion of learning. From the age of sixty, we resume our aging process, so that we at 72 would appear to be about 30 to you. Our normal life-span is 112 years. It is as if the aging process in our race takes a 42 year vacation, whereas in yours it is continuous.

"Reverting for a moment to clothes, we wear cloaks during the *pale sun* (or season) when the air is cold. During the *green sun*

we wear clothes on occasions such as your reception tonight. And then their purpose is simply decoration, not concealment as you will notice.

"Our day is divided into 9 'breaks' as compared with your 24 hours. There are 412 days in our year. Our 'opal' seasons, when we see our most glorious colors, correspond to your spring and fall. It is during these seasons that the sun is shifting from pale to green, in the spring. And from green to pale, in the fall.

"Those are the facts which I perceive to be most notably variable from life and custom as you know it. I felt that you would be more at ease tonight if you understood—and we do want you to appear to the greatest advantage before the public. So much depends on their confidence in you."

Der Koob stopped his talk suddenly, and glanced up.

"Sit down, Eltil," he said smiling, "we were just discussing life and custom, and the feathers you'll be wearing tonight."

"Just one question, Der," I said. "Eltil is still collarless. She is very attractive, but I have important work to do before I think of anything else. Hence I must not do anything inadvertently which would tend to delay or interfere with the accomplishment of my mission. Can you and Eltil guide me?"

Both my companions smiled brightly. Eltil deliberately reached out and patted my back. But it was Koob that answered.

"By order of the Council, you are free of rules, penalties and restrictions until your work is done," he said. "They passed this ruling after we had ready your mind and found it ethical from your own standpoint. We are satisfied if you accomplish what we ask of you, your reward is your own to name both now and when it is completed. We ask only that you wear an impervium cap to keep your thoughts from the public at all times, and that you refrain from discussing your solutions outside of council even with Eltil, with whom it would be only natural that you speak of them."

I turned in surprise.

"So you can shield your thoughts from others," I said, thoughtfully. "But as you said, cannot sustain the deceit indefinitely, I see."

Eltil rose to her feet. "It's time for feathers," she announced gaily, and I watched her move gracefully across the

room toward the dormitory sleeping quarters.

Feeling a sudden desire to move I got to my feet and glanced out the breast-high window, just in time to see a solemn changing of guards outside my wall.

"Sentries?" I said, idly.

"A heavy guard at all times until your work is done, John," Koob said. "But it will not interfere with your freedom of action in any way. Meantime, it's growing late. Shall we dress?"

Der Koob got to his feet and led me into the sleeping quarters. Eltil was adjusting anklets of bright red feathers as we entered. She already wore bands of feathers above each knee, and wristlets, armbands, and a belt of the same kind and color. An elaborate headdress framed her face, and a queue of long feathers dangled down her back. She straightened up, smiled, and pirouetted as we entered.

"How do I look now, John?" she asked.

THE reception was like a gigantic poultry show. I shook hands with 2,500 men and women as they passed by my raised seat. Both sexes were adorned in feathered finery, in much the same manner, except that the women's headdress was more elaborate. Der Koob, on the other hand wore only a six-inch wide belt of blue feathers—and so did I.

When the reception line had passed and the vast crowd was dancing to some reedy music, Tae Nerle strolled to my seat and chatted for a moment. She was dressed exactly as Koob was, with a single six-inch wide belt of blue feathers. No headdress. Her hair was piled high on her head like the styles of forty years ago in our world.

"Has the blue belt a special significance?" I asked her conversationally.

"It's the badge of Council, John Emmett," she said in her clear alto voice. "Insofar as there is or can be a royal seal among democrats, that is it."

"How many people are there in Korcin?" I asked.

"Nearly four million."

"And the problem I am to face tomorrow?"

She glanced at me quickly, then glanced around before answering.

"We are under attack from the Gracins, and there are 22,000,000 of them. Green

men." Even her voice was troubled as she spoke.

"Democrats?"

"No. They are ruled by an oligarchy, hereditary of course. To make life easier for their people they desire to enslave the Korcins. To date they have been held back by our men in the narrow confines of four passes through the mountains, but if we lose an equal number of men continuously they will conquer in six more months. We have lost 300,000 to date. The committee tried to keep your first day free of care," she sighed.

"This settlement," I said, "is small. It does not, then, represent your bigger cities?"

"Yes, and no. We use platinum in all our buildings—but this is a new council center established by the sea as the farthest point from the action and the one from which orders can best be radiated to the front."

The crowd eddied and whirled before us as the strains of reedy music rose and fell in a sort of bagpipe wail. The smoke of tapers along the walls rose in clouds in the center of the high-arched, silvery ceiling of the hall. Sprumes of smoke from tapers in chandeliers hung over the center of the floor, rose to join the clouds which disappeared in the dimness of the upper spaces.

The babel of voices rose and fell as featherted young people waltzed together as unconscious of their persons as tiny children. There was something wholesome about Korcin, something intriguing—and I remembered they had concentrated their telepathic powers into another and a greater world to bring from it a teacher of physics, that he might become a general.

Tae Nerle, seated beside me, watched my observations thoughtfully, though the imperium cap hid my thoughts from her. Eltil danced by and waved gaily. She did not seem to be bothered by the war.

"Eltil seems to be enjoying the party," I said.

"Yes," Tae answered, "I'm glad for her. It's her first feathers, and already she has lost two splendid brothers in the war for preservation."

MY mind was beginning to turn on ideas. Outnumbered nearly six to one, we would have to do something spectacular, something unheard of if we were to overcome such opposition.

"Could we leave without upsetting the party?" I asked.

"Yes, and your desire is law," Tae replied.

"Then let's go. I see no reason to wait until tomorrow. Are there nitrates in Korcin?"

"Since we searched your mind," she told me softly, "we have already located nitrates three hundred miles inland. A force of four thousand men is working in single 'break' shifts. They will be shipping to the new gun powder factory by morning. We are helping you all we can. Whether our metals can be molded and stiffened to hold such explosions we will only know when we test them. Blast furnaces are being built, crude but able to melt ore, and we have already found iron."

Tae and I slipped quietly from the room and started toward my quarters. But we had not advanced three steps from the outer wall before the guard fell in a hollow square about us. They were taking no chances.

"Can you make cloth, Tae?"

"We have to build looms, and collect wool," she said simply. "And that, not being a requirement for victory—"

"But it is!" I almost snapped. "You have good dyes. I've seen red, blue, yellow—golden yellow—dyed feathers. Those dyes will color cloth. The Green men do not wear clothes, do they?"

"Yes," Tae smiled, "we have good, fast dyes. No, the Green men do not wear clothes."

"Then the psychological effect of an army in brilliant, scarlet uniforms, with gold braid, and trim-fitting boots, will paralyze them. Your wooden spears evidently match their weapons effectively. Then we will equip our new army with steel sabers as fast as we can turn them out. And with the burning of gunpowder we will shift this battle into a tragedy for Gracin." I was getting excited about possibilities now, and I had an advantage with my impervium cap. I could complete and organize my thoughts before anyone else caught them. But suddenly a thought struck me.

"I'm telling you too much, Tae. Your thoughts can be read."

Without a word, Tae pulled an impervium cap from within her blue feather belt, and slipped it over her head.

"Beginning with tomorrow's meeting the Council wears impervium until the war is

ended," she said. "I'll risk the law by donning mine tonight."

"It is my order," I told her.

"Thank you, John."

The guard dispersed around the house as we reached the entrance. Two soldiers preceded us inside and searched every nook for possible intruders. They slipped out quietly as soon as they were through and left us alone.

"We'll need gun-cotton. We'll need to be certain to keep our plans from possible traitors—though I guess your mind-reading clears that point." I lay down in the corner on the pillows, for I had learned that no one would recline while I stood. Tae lighted two tapers along the wall, then joined me, reclining three feet away so conversation could not be overheard.

"We have searched and found wild cotton this afternoon, John. It is being gathered by a small army of girls and women in the Herzan district only fifty of your miles from here."

"Saltpetre?"

"A substitute which we believe will serve. A nitrate."

THREE weeks rolled by. Korcin had gunpowder. Slaves were used to carry supplies to the testing field for guns. When a mortar worked effectively at last, a group of slaves was staring wide-eyed in awe.

One of the slaves was permitted to escape that night, and clever guards trailed him to ascertain that he headed straight for Gracin with his story.

Women were learning to be seamstresses. Looms were almost ready to spin wool. Wool had been gathered, cleansed and treated. Dye vats were filled and waiting. Silvery vats such as our own world never saw.

In six weeks cloth rolled from the looms and came from the vats a brilliant scarlet. It was turned into trim uniforms. The women of Korcin adapted themselves to tailoring as if it had been an hereditary art.

My uniform was the first. You have seen it under the glass. Boots were ready almost simultaneously. Boots made from leather hides taken from a species of wild antelope. You have seen mine.

The day that I stepped from my quarters attired in my trimly tailored uniform, I knew the war was won. A dozen slaves, passing by, dropped their loads and stared. The populace stood frozen in its tracks.

Tae Nerle, coming across the grassy plot between the buildings, hesitated for a moment, then came on. Her smile held hope.

"It's done, John. The effect is all you hoped for. Any orders?"

"Yes," I motioned Der Koob to come closer. "Tonight, I want three of the slaves in that group to escape and carry the story back to Gracin." The two council members nodded together.

ANOTHER week, and the sentries about my house were pacing a bit awkwardly in their tight-fitting scarlet garb and leather boots. They suffered a bit from the heat. But their scarlet caps set at a jaunty angle, and steel sabers dangled from their belts.

Only one more week had to pass before I was drilling a scarlet-uniformed regiment on the silver beach. A reed band set the tempo for the drill with its wailing music. Precision drill had been unknown in Korcin, but it raised the morale of the men until it alone would have offset the superiority of Gracin's numbers of (wooden) spearmen and knife throwers.

Four trench mortars were drawn by hand, as standard equipment of the regiment. These were followed by four trailers loaded with crude shells, and gunpowder, and cotton.

My first regiment had been selected for the keenness of its intellects. The results of this selection were amazing. Nine weeks after my arrival I addressed the regiment through Der Koob (also attired in scarlet as my chief-of-staff) as interpreter.

"We will march on Gracin and defeat its army, starting in just three weeks," I told them that and waited while Koob's musical syllables repeated. "Meantime you will train ten new regiments which are now being uniformed. Each captain of this regiment, is raised to the colonelcy of his new one. In order of rank you are promoted proportionately so that every private becomes a sergeant, at least. Your new colonels will adjust any additional promotions required for the new organization. You must organize a band for each regiment, for we will march to music. Remember, in three weeks the army must be ready to march. Equipment is ready. Regiment dismissed in charge of company commanders."

I raised the majors of that regiment to brigadier generals. Der Koob, who had

served as my lieutenant-colonel, moved up as I became a major-general! He of course became a brigadier general and remained my chief of staff.

A stranger situation, man never faced. A nation without machinery becoming a military force in three months' time as I calculated time. To them it was less than a quarter of a year.

CHAPTER II

JENIL was a small settlement. It had been necessary to bring men from three nearby cities to complete my ten regiments. They had been sleeping on the beach, under bushes, wherever they found a place to rest. But with the first phase of the organization completed better arrangements were underway.

The year was drawing toward the close of the season of the green sun. I understood from council that the season of the pale sun would see fighting come to a standstill due to the cold; that the two armies would encamp at the passes, and wait until the opal sun before resuming the active campaign.

That left three months of active fighting ahead, and, as I came to know the situation I realized that the morale of Korcin was sinking fast. Reports from the front were not over optimistic. Had it not been for the knowledge of our new forces in training Korcin's army would probably have capitulated. As matters stood they had lost another 100,000 men killed, during the three months of my preparatory maneuvers.

As soon as possible, therefore, I led my ten thousand troops, and the supply trains, out of Jenil, on a march which would cover the eleven major cities of the nation on our circuitous march to the front. Marching four abreast our column was wider than the foot-trails between the cities, but by the time ten thousand pair of boots traversed them the trails were roads, over which the wheeled vehicles of the supply trains, and the caissons and guns, could roll.

Bands playing, scarlet uniforms made a made a striking spectacle under the green sun. We marched into the outskirts of Banoj toward evening of the second day, to find the tents on which they had been working already pitched and ready for the troops. Enthusiasm and hope for victory grew like the crest of a raging flood as we

marched through the rambling central street of the city. Men who had been resigned to fate began to dream of safety. The naked populace was awed by the sight of the uniformed troops, and I at that moment could have claimed to be a god without the vestige of a doubt entering a single mind.

Back in camp, I gave strict orders for every soldier to bathe his feet in a solution I had worked out for Tae Nerle to have manufactured. We faced a long march with a fight at the end of it.

The tents helped to build the army morale, and I turned toward my luxurious quarters in town with a feeling of surety. But surprise was in store. Tae Nerle was waiting in the doorway, smiling, garbed in the brilliant uniform of a sergeant of the line.

"Tae," I said seriously. "The uniform is for the army. The effect must not be broken."

"I know," she said seriously, "but the effect is just as great in speeding up production. I felt that you might let me join you on the march, acting as army representative as well as for council, in my various organization activities. You see I can send thoughts in messages just as well from wherever you are. And I have one other suggestion. Teach your army to sing, and it will be invincible."

Here was a problem. And logic. And it might be well if I could talk to Tae.

"All right, Colonel," I said. "See that your insignia is changed at once and join my staff."

I left one company in Banoj, a company which was to become a regiment and follow us in three weeks. Then we moved on to Grule, to Matog, to Koge, to Semp, to Farge, and on again. And in each town we left a company which was to become a regiment. Tae Nerle arranged that uniforms and equipment would be ready as fast as the regiments were trained.

Our march brought us toward the passes halfway of the opal season, nine thousand strong but a new regiment due to arrive every day starting in about two weeks, until our strength reached 19,000 men.

The vast open plain we crossed to reach the mountains became a place of song and confidence, despite the fact that nine thousand men were marching to save a half-million! And despite the fact that we were marching to do battle with an army of over a million!

Three days on the plain—and then the sounds of battle, the sight of wounded men on stretchers. Remember that up to now there had been no wheeled vehicles in all this world.

Our bands kept playing; our men kept singing. The uniformed troops carried a sense of power as scarlet uniforms flashed under the opal sun. And as we came up to the camps we were greeted by such yells of enthusiasm that the sound of it carried to Gracin's army as we learned later, and caused the first momentary panic among their soldiers. For rumors had drifted even to the front lines, of the stories told by their slaves, and by the returning prisoners.

We pitched our tents to the wonderment of the naked troops of Korcin, and our soldiers passed the word that before the pale sun there would be tents for all. Yet I deemed it unwise to issue uniforms to any save trained troops.

The battle slackened after our arrival. Our resistance stiffened and the attackers faltered sufficiently so that I took three weeks and set about training twenty additional regiments. Tae Nerle (the perfect quartermaster general if ever one lived) sat radiating mental orders to all sections of Korcin, orders which resulted in the arrival of trench mortars, ammunition, sabers and uniforms on wheeled supply trains by the time we had undergone two weeks of precision drill with our new regiments.

And by this time, every passing day saw a new scarlet ribbon winding across the plain toward camp. To the tune of reed bands men marched into camp singing what to them must have been gypsy airs.

I did not need to have Tae Nerle tell me that spies high on the mountains were watching the approaching troops each day. I did not need her assurance that panic was spreading among the enemy as those scouts trebled and quadrupled their estimates of our numbers. I felt it in the enthusiasm with which our naked troops reported that they had driven the invaders out of one pass and built a breastwork barrier at its far end so that the enemy had to attack from the open. I noticed that our casualties were fewer, that our naked fighters began to imitate our column formations, that they marched singing into the pass when the troops changed.

The opal season ended abruptly. Over-night the weather was below the freezing point, and the sun a pale disk in the heavens. Quiet reigned in the passes; our

naked contingents huddled down about their fires. But our entire army was billeted in tents; our effectives numbered thirty-nine thousand swordsmen, and 136 Trench Mortars which were effective at a half mile distance!

Der Koob rode with me. Tae Nerle dispatched the troops from camp in accordance with our orders. Scouts confirmed her report that the Gracin army was suffering from cold, and calm in the belief that there would be no fighting for three months and more, as I figure time.

So on the fifth day of the pale sun we marched, in warm, woolen scarlet uniforms, sabers flashing in the sun, straight through the four passes in the mountains and out the other side. Close behind our advance companies, came the trench mortars, ten through each pass.

The scarlet troops of Korcin, marching silently, took the skeleton guards of the Gracins by complete surprise and made short work of them with naked steel. It was bloody work, but the mortars were in place before the main force started forward from their camp. And even then I could see the signs of panic that was brewing.

Four scarlet streams poured through four passes a mile apart in what must have appeared an endless procession. The streams spread into widening fans, moving forward like an avenging avalanche. Their very appearance spoke confidence.

And just as the cold, shivering army of Gracin began to move, the first mortar dropped its message of death into their very camp! Another spoke, and another, until forty explosions had rocked the camp, killing hundreds of their soldiers.

The scarlet fans grew bigger and came closer. The lines of uniformed soldiers joined together until the line was five miles long, and still moving like a juggernaut.

The shriek of the mortars became continuous. They dropped hell and havoc amidst knots of bewildered troops who had heard tales of growing power. And still the ribbons of red poured from the passes to broaden the fans and reinforce them.

The advance guards of the Gracins faced cold steel, and died. Their wooden spears were sliced in two by a sweep from a saber. And the saber on a second sweep cut down the man who had held the spear. Officers exhorted, and sorties moved against the scarlet line—and died! Then, as if it were

a spontaneous emotion, the red-clad soldiers burst into song as they moved forward.

And the army of Gracin broke, and fled before them! That was the beginning of a rout which carried us to victory on a song. Our naked army was following our military through the passes in support.

THROUGH Koob, I wirelessly Tae Nerle to permit only 39,000 of them to follow. To hold the rest and barricade the passes after she sent our supply trains through. I told her to mount five mortars in each pass, and wait for our return.

Then we went on, running. For our army had been running, overtaking and cutting down their would-be oppressors. Thousands of Gracin dead lay strewn about the plain, and so far I had seen only one Korcin body. He had obviously tripped and fallen on his own sword.

I let the rout go forward thirty miles, then signalled Tae to gather in all war materials and food from the deserted camps. Thus too an army can be crippled.

By noon of the next day, our troops, exhausted, had scattered the Army of Gracin like chaff. Its general staff was brought to me in chains. More than 50,000 of its soldiers had been cut down.

We pitched camp, for the tents were on each soldier's back. Guards were mounted and our military slept. The supply trains came up and a hot meal was waiting when the troops awoke.

Meantime I held court.

"General," I said, "I believe you should be the first to say what you have to say. I will listen." Der Koob translated my words and listened to an eloquent series of remarks from the Gracin commander.

"He says," Koob repeated, "that you wage unfair war. That it is not fair for you to drop death from the heavens. And that such tactics lead only to revenge."

I listened carefully, and thought hard. Those words reminded me of certain types of minds I had met on earth. There was only one cure, but it would be unwise at the moment to apply it.

"Take the general outside while I hear his staff, one by one."

The man fairly frothed at the command but he was removed. Two of his aides echoed his words, but three of them, craved mercy for the troops.

"Remember, General, that they were under orders," said the last man.

"What position do you hold in the oligarchy?" I asked, puzzled. He drew himself up proudly.

"I am the eldest son of the hereditary ruler, who was reduced to a member of the oligarchs, by them, when the military became empire-minded."

"I see," I thought hard; "I may be sacrificing you in a way, but I'm going to let each of you hear the others sentenced. In the long run you may gain."

The staff was brought in again.

"Flane," I said. "Your words in answer to my request proved that you are not a general despite your supposed rank. I sentence you to return to Korcin and slavery until such time as we may determine some other disposition for your case. Garth and Clon, both of whom echoed your words, receive the same sentence. Tarl, and Fren, thought independently and asked lenience for all prisoners. I sentence them to imprisonment during the period of the war, in gentlemen's quarters. Nean, who spoke and acted as a general should, shall have his shackles removed. He will be given a guard and safe escort to the capital city where he will pass my message to your government. The war will be waged unceasingly until he returns with the answer and with the guard.

"Nean will give me his word as a gentleman that he remains our prisoner."

Der Koob repeated my speech. I could follow its progress by the looks of surprise and chagrin on the faces of the prisoners. When it came Nean's turn he listened and paled. He stepped one pace forward, bowed, and shook hands with himself, then stepped back, and soldiers removed his manacles.

Within the hour Nean, with a company of my scarlet-clad soldiers, rode out of the camp toward Gracin City.

The campaign went on. Here and there we met little knots of resistance, but the country was completely demoralized under the spell of the stories told by the fleeing, hiding troops. Stories were also told of Nean riding toward the capital at the head of a company of Korcin soldiers.

We left billets behind us to keep the communication trail open; contingents of naked troops commanded by scarlet-uniformed officers. But we were within fifty miles of Gracin City before my troop came back, ragged and bloody, but headed by a proud, though weak, Nean.

"They have killed my father," he re-

ported. "They tried to kill me, but your soldiers wiped out the palace guard and brought me clear. General Emmett, I offer you my hand, and my arm in battle if you need them. I have some slight influence with the people."

As Der Koob repeated the man's words I got to my feet. I knew Gracin was defeated then. I stepped forward and took his hand, then led him back and seated him beside me.

"You shall be measured for a uniform at once, Nean." I said. "Yours shall be green, with scarlet trim. If Der Koob agrees, you and I shall ride side by side at the head of our troops, and the flags of Korcin and Gracin shall float side by side at the head of the column. I will send out the order at once and you will raise ten thousand troops to join us, wearing your uniform. I will provide the uniforms and the sabers and guns. Again if Der Koob agrees, you will be seated as the ruler of your people, subject only to the council of Korcin."

Koob bowed soberly. "You feel this is wise, John?"

"I do, Der. We are not big enough to keep these people in subjection, but this will cause them to subject themselves."

Koob smiled and bowed. "You are wise, John Emmett. I agree, for council." He turned then, and repeated my speech to Nean, who rose, bowed, then dropped on one knee and kissed the hem of my military jacket.

FOUR weeks later, Nean and I marched into Gracin City side by side at the head of forty thousand troops; 30,000 of them were my scarlet-clad legions; 10,000 were Nean's green-clad troops of the New Gracin.

There had been a fight, a stiff fight outside the city. But red and green uniforms had fought as a unified force, and the mortars had broken the morale while the sabers did their deadly work. Eleven thousand of the oligarchy's finest troops had died, including several hundred of the oligarchs themselves.

Nean ruled. Our troops, keeping communication with Tae Nerle, had dismissed half the naked army which guarded the pass, keeping only 100,000 men on guard.

From reports relayed to me I knew the nation of Korcin was delirious with joy. Their young men were returning home! Gracin was reduced to a dominion. The

opal season of spring was almost due, and machinery was beginning to appear in mystifying forms. One need not spade one's garden this spring, for instance. He could plow it! For antelope had been tamed for harness during the season of the pale sun, and the plows were ready.

We stayed two months, in Gracin City. Our troops made friends with the people through the mediation of their green-clad fellow troopers. Der Koob and I were guests of Nean at the restored Royal Palace, and we were feted continuously. It became obvious that no show of force would long be necessary to complete the pacification of the nation. So at the end of two months we agreed to leave ten regiments of reds to train an additional twenty thousand greens before they departed for home one year later.

Then, marching before our singing army, Der Koob and I led the march back toward Korcin picking up our billeted contingents as we marched. A permanent garrison of one scarlet regiment was left at each pass with ten mortars. The balance of the army marched toward home, victorious, under the warming rays of the opal sun.

Through the eleven cities of Korcin we marched as we had done when we departed, and in each city we dismissed the local troops, enrolling them in a callable militia.

Then back toward Jenil, with Tae Nerle marching straight and strong beside me. There was a proud look in her eyes. She had done her job well, and I had praised her for it.

"You know, though, John," she said, and seemed the least bit embarrassed as she said it, "something very peculiar has come over me. I've been wearing this uniform for a long time now, and I feel that I would be terribly embarrassed if I were to take it off. It's silly, but it's true—and I'm not alone. If you watch as we go through the settlements you will see that since we began to distribute cloth through the stores, both men and women have taken to wearing little aprons, and belt-like cloths around them. You're doing something to us all, John Emmett."

And I did look, and it was true. Not every one of course, but here and there people wore cloth tied at one side and wrapped around them. Once I even saw a man wearing a crudely formed loin-cloth. I saw girls with turban-like wrappings on their heads.

I was interested, and amused. The scar-

let uniforms had done more than conquer Garcin. They were beginning to conquer this whole naive world.

"Given five years," I remarked to Tae, "and the women will be vieing to outdo each other's finery in cloth as much as they do now in feathers."

"Yes," she said, "I'm afraid of the complications. I think you'll have another battle ahead. Remember what happens to the savages in your world when you clothe them. Do you know much of the practice of medicine?"

I looked at Tae wonderingly. "So you even remember my remotest thoughts," I said. "I know as much of medicine as I did of military tactics. Remember I have no books."

"No," she said, "but you could remove your impervium now and then and we could review them for you!"

"Perhaps," I was startled at the thought, "but you are a remarkable woman, Tae, and I don't know that it would be wise always to reveal my thoughts."

"Have you forgotten Eltil," she asked, soberly.

"No," I told her frankly, "and it bothers me. I haven't. And I can't forget you."

"I have thought of it a good deal," she told me, "and Eltil and I have discussed it. You are still above rules you know, and if you wished, and we were willing, you might not have to forget either of us. Am I being very bold, John Emmett?"

CHAPTER III

DERHAPS I was a busybody by nature. I don't know. I could have claimed my reward and come back to my own earth of familiar machines, and to a life of test-tubes and classrooms in the High School immediately.

I considered that. But on the fourth day after my return to Jenil, a radiated message from Grule told of the collapse of a three-story structure in process of erection. Seventeen men had been killed beneath falling beams and masonry.

On the fifth day of my planned rest Tae Nerle came to my quarters with stories of mishaps from a dozen points. The vision of a machine world, glimpsed by fifty people as they read my thoughts a year before, had resulted in a national hysteria. Distorted ideas of that world had reached the uttermost parts of the land, and ignorant men

were trying to accomplish in a day what our world had done in slow centuries of struggle.

A new Korcin was in the making. Wheels, and cloth, and simple machinery had brought changes not only in the material possessions of the people but in their dreams and ambitions.

There was no stopping this terrific surge of awakening growth. The thought had been planted and could not be erased. Therefore it had to be directed.

In a sense I was responsible, and I took my responsibility seriously. Of course, there was a certain exhilaration in the sense of growing power. Wherever I moved, men and women looked at me with a certain awed respect. I was the hero of the hour, for I had given the nation its new life and freedom.

I had few intimate friends. Der Koob, Tae Nerle, Eltil Raey, and Lan Gero (who had been a colonel of my reds) I could talk to. Tol Erba, who might have made a name for himself in the new world, had been intercepted radiating messages to Gracian belittling our red army, and had been "eliminated."

Now Der Koob, pleading that he had a family and that he had been away from home for over a year, asked me to release him from headquarters duty and accept Colonel Tae Nerle in his stead as my interpreter. I had no excuse for refusing, so we called council for a final discussion of the change; and to make plans for curbing the new crisis.

The results of the meeting were concise and fast.

Erl Taub, the dean of the councilors, made a short talk. He was 103 years of age and had served on council 53 of those years. When he spoke the others listened.

"When we sent for John Emmett," he said, "we were face to face with the end of our national life. He saved us cleverly. It is his brain which released the ideas now sweeping our people. Council cannot successfully cope with the situation, which may be considered as part of the war crisis. I suggest that we name him as military dictator for a period of three years. Every member of his staff and household to have military rating. Council to meet again three years from today. He should be free to organize such curbs as he feels wise. We know him to be a safe ruler. Colonel Nerle is free to serve as his interpreter and aide. Eltil Raey has expressed her desire to con-

tinue in charge of his household. That is all."

I opened my mouth to speak, but the matter was settled before I could protest rationally. I was the military governor of Korcin, and the responsibility was really mine now.

A surge of nostalgia swept over me as I thought of the familiar things of earth, yet I had no close ties and Tae's face across the table dissipated the momentary regret.

Besides, I was helpless to leave without their cooperation!

I APPOINTED Eltil a sergeant of the line in keeping with the suggestion of the council, and satisfied her desire for a scarlet uniform as well. But I designated that she wear a skirt instead of britches with her military jacket hoping that it would set a trend in feminine attire. Tae Nerle's plain collar excused her regulation outfit.

Lan Gero became a frequent visitor as we laid plans for regulation of construction throughout Korcin. It was necessary to set up a housing bureau to pass on all plans. Engineering regulations were necessary in the calculation of stress, and the insistence on steel beams for any building of more than two stories.

For a week I let Tae Nerle and Gero study my thoughts, tracing my knowledge of steel, stress, and building in general. They had the advantage, for they were able to follow minute details of books which I had read, details which I never for a moment could have recalled. Having traced the thoughts, I designated Colonel Gero as head of the department of housing and engineering. Colonel Nerle undertook to organize fast "Antelope Express" service between cities so that all plans could be submitted on bark—as yet there was no paper—before construction could be started on any project involving the use of the new metals.

During a six-month tour, accompanied by Tae and Eltil, I saw cities growing where log communities had stood before. I watched men of the soil struggling with fractious antelopes hitched to plows, but I saw the struggle for existence becoming easier.

I had crossed the nation afoot with the army. Now, four fleet-footed little animals drew my carriage and the roads seemed to shorten perceptibly. The carriage was crude, but it pioneered the way to comfort.

Willing hands tended the antelope wherever we stopped. Anxious local councilors

guided us on tours of inspection, showing their new buildings and machinery.

At Farge we saw the beginning of Korcin's first municipal water supply and sewage system. This I inspected carefully, warning Tae of the dangers, and of the necessity for a sewage disposal unit. She listened thoughtfully, then asked:

"Would you mind removing your imperium for a few minutes so I can trace the detailed requirements?"

I did so, and fifteen minutes later she issued an order so specific in its detail that to this day I marvel at the sanitary systems installed in the urban centers of Korcin.

One fact bothered me. I watched carefully throughout the trip and saw no provisions aside from kitchen stoves, in any of the new buildings, for either heat or light.

On my return to Jenil, therefore, I worked for three months, perfecting a small electrical unit for my home. Tae found tungsten and managed the manufacture of the necessary motor, dynamo, and storage batteries. She produced the wire as I needed it, and the sockets and bulbs. Six more months had passed before the unit was installed. Then for the first time I thought of fuel.

Six more weeks passed before oil was found on the plain near the mountains, then wells had to be drilled. But a gusher came in finally, and the refineries were waiting when it did.

So my lights finally came on, and for three days the populace passed in single file through my hallway and main living room, examining them in wonder. Units were made available, and in two years huge dynamos could be built, though their weight prevented their transportation.

That difficulty was overcome in the same manner as the transport of heavy steel had been obviated. Small parts were carried by antelope express. Large castings were made on the spot even if it were necessary to build crude furnaces and rolling mills and tear them down again.

It was a sight worthy of ancient Egypt, to see a hundred men working the steel cables on an improvised crane, raising a beam into place and rivetting it, in accordance with the new housing regulations.

But they managed to create street lights, and municipal power plants despite these obstacles. And the improvements went on. Electric heaters appeared, and electric irons

with which to press the new cloth uniforms.

THE populace took to clothes naturally with the coming of the pale sun, and discarded them promptly when the weather turned warm. Of course, there was the tendency to drape bits of cloth about the body even in the warmth of the green sun. But it appeared that a balance would be reached which would be sane and sensible.

Oil burners came next, oil heaters which could keep the houses and buildings comfortable. Life in Korcin became more comfortable.

It had always been busy.

As my three-year dictatorship drew to its close I saw a nation in the midst of a sane, progressive program of improvement. The hysteria had died down. Order had been maintained, and I was ready to turn my thoughts away from responsibilities.

I sat down to a delicious dinner of foods which I had never tasted until three years before, with two beautiful women whose friendship had come to mean a great deal to me. I removed the imperium cap which had guarded my thoughts most of the time for five long years and laid it aside.

Tae and Eltil were both blushing as I looked up. I wondered for a moment then realized what I had been thinking. But I had known them both too well and too long to be embarrassed. I smiled at both.

"I'm not ashamed," I said. "You both mean a great deal to me. We may as well be honest about it—but in five years I haven't been able to reach a solution which comes within your laws, or the laws of my world either for that matter."

"Yet it is time I managed a solution of my own affairs!"

Tae smiled, and cocked her head to one side as if she were listening. I noticed and stopped talking. Eltil, too, seemed to be hearing something and was very sober. I had become accustomed to such attitudes during my stay, and waited patiently.

"John," Tae said finally, "an epidemic has broken out and it seems to be fairly general throughout Korcin. Lungs become blocked, hollow coughs follow, and death seems the inevitable end. I have listened just now to an estimate that there are 10,000 cases throughout the country."

Tuberculosis had appeared! The curse of clothing, and close houses. It was the story of civilization repeating itself. I moved from the table, issuing orders as I did so.

Fast antelopes carried us from city to city. Everywhere we could see what electricity had done for the nation. Buildings three stories high had replaced the low stores on the business streets. Nails, screws and lathes had brought chairs and furnishings into being. The nation was a beehive.

But the bees were sick! Tae and Eltil were tireless. Gero went sleepless night after night radiating messages while Tae slept. We traveled everywhere setting up tent units, organizing nursing hospitals, lecturing on quarantines, insisting that chests be exposed to the air.

By the end of the year we felt that the epidemic was under control and once more returned to Jenil for a rest.

My personal problems were still unsolved, but the loyalty of love had exacted its price. Eltil showed signs of consumption. I talked the matter over with Tae, and we took her to our highest sanitarium in the mountains. But she was listless. I grew anxious.

One night under the stars, Tae and I stood looking across the high peaks, toward Gracin City. Tae squeezed my arm.

"Kiss me, John," she said. "It will help me say what I have to say." I gathered her in my arms and kissed her tenderly.

"John, dear," she continued after a time, her fingers toying with the gold braid on my jacket, "it hurts me to say this. I waited eighteen years before I met a man to whom I could confess my love. Now I have met him and I know he cares for me. But he cares also for that child inside, and she is dying, partly because she loves him too. Mate with her, John. If you do not, and she dies, you will never forgive yourself. We can wait, you and I, forever if need be. Your decision is made for you."

So it was in the opal season a mating collar of platinum was riveted on my neck. You have seen it. Its counterpart was riveted on Eltil's golden throat.

She rallied after that, and before the pale sun had gone she was home, thinner, paler, but happy. And I was happy, too, for Tae was like a sister to her, and not jealous of the peace with which I lived as I watched Korcin grow.

But suddenly, of late, Eltil took a turn for the worse after a year and a half of improvement. Not only that, but the epidemic has broken out worse than ever before. There are upward of 50,000 reported cases of the plague.

We need a doctor badly. That thought

haunted me day and night. It haunts me now. For given one good doctor and we could produce as many competent assistants as he might need within one week!

Tae could trace his knowledge of drugs and medicine, and set up manufactories for his medical supply requirements. He would be a great man.

I discussed the situation with Der Koob, and Tae Nerle, and Lan Gero. Council was called and it was decided that I should return to earth.

I kissed Eltil good-bye, for I loved her tenderly, and as she held my hand she looked into my eyes and said, "I've been very, very happy, John, and I'm glad you're going on doing good. I wouldn't have it otherwise. I may not be here when you return, but if I'm not I'll be glad for Tae. Think of me while you're gone, dear, and I'll know."

It was hard to break away, but I watched the mountain of platinum being built on the beach. It was a mountain, and it could not have been constructed had not the nation progressed tremendously with its hoisting machinery.

Erl Taub, standing beside me, expressed the thoughts of the councilors.

"If you never return, John, we will always remember you affectionately and proudly. You are free to use this fortune as reward, expense, or for whatever your desire may be. We hope you may return with a doctor, or without one. Come, it is time."

Naked as a new-born babe I lay down on a silver beach facing an opal sea. A green sun shone overhead, and a circle of fifty men as naked as I, surrounded me. I slept. My head began to throb. It ached, fearfully. I began to grow giddy and dream of falling, falling, falling through space, time without end. I thumped down on something and the dream faded.

I felt smothered, and sat up among a maze of ropes. I began to climb and the climb was interminable. I went on and on, climbing, climbing. Far above I could see daylight. I neared it. At last I climbed out, exhausted, on a hempen girder twenty feet across. I clung and watched it grow smaller. Eight feet, four, three, two! I looked across a vast plain, and saw a huge cube of platinum, beside me, yet far away.

I was returning to my own world!

My uniform and neck circlet lay nearby. They were small but I picked the uniform

up and held it in my hand. The circlet I slipped on my finger, but after a moment it grew snug and I slipped it off quickly.

The girders slid together beneath my feet. I sat down in the chair. My head rose slowly above the table surface. I gulped great lungfuls of pure air. I reached out and sipped the rest of the brandy which stood before me.

Today is January 4th, 1939. I have been gone one day. I have lived seven years; I am one day older. Yet if a single day passes before I return to Korcin, **seven** years will have passed. I want a doctor to go with me.

I had hoped to save Eltil. It may be too late for that, but there are a million other

serious young man for several years, pleaded with Dr. Holmes to return to this unknown world with him. They left my home together, and were arguing as they reached the street. Dr. Holmes seemed to hesitate, but finally turned and went toward Emmett's rooms with him.

Dr. Holmes is a widower with grown children.

Next morning, I received a note in the doctor's handwriting together with the cube of platinum mentioned in this statement. (I took the liberty of having the fact that it is platinum, ascertained. It is.) The note authorized me to hold the cube for six months, pending the return of either Emmett, or himself, or of both. If they fail to

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lives just as important to them as ours are to us. And we have not begun to explore the possibilities of Korcin.

That is why I asked you, Dr. Holmes, to examine me, and to serve as a witness. If you will go this statement has served its purpose. If you won't, I must publish it and find a man who will.

Remember seven years in Korcin costs only one day in this life. But every day that passes costs seven years of Tragedy in Korcin.

You have seen my proof. I will leave it with you.

STATEMENT BY EDWARD WALES

The above document is the most remarkable piece of writing, be it fact or fiction, that I have ever seen. I am taking the liberty to submit it for publication for these reasons:

John Emmett, whom I had known as a

return within that time, I am to sell the cube and put the proceeds in trust for his children.

Three months have passed, and no word has come. Neither John Emmett nor Dr. Eric Holmes has been seen since that night at my home when Emmett wrote this amazing statement.

They did not leave town, that I have ascertained beyond any reasonable doubt. I have locked Emmett's rooms, and guaranteed the rent for six months. I have done the same with Dr. Holmes' house.

I have the glass slide, on which is mounted the tiny collar, and the uniform and boots, in my safe.

I, for one, am convinced that the two men returned to Korcin; and may even have lived their full life-spans and died. In any event I believe this story should not be hidden in my safe forever.

(Signed) EDWARD WALES.



Illustration by Dorothy Les Tina

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THE

• LEAPERS •

By

Carol Grey

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THE AVID followers of daily papers may have noted some weeks ago a small item which appeared in nearly all of the metropolitan afternoon editions and which, in some instances, was recounted upon radio news-reviews. In some cases, I believe, it was carried over for the rest of that day's editions. In all papers the headlines were virtually the same, as was the wording of the story proper.

IRON SHOES WILL REPEL LUNAR DRAG SAYS BROOKLYN SCHOLAR

Brooklyn, New York, July 5—That the moon is responsible for more than lightheadedness, Arthur Clarkson of 1746 Bradford Drive, Brooklyn, is sure. Clarkson stated yesterday that earth's satellite has taken to "negating terrestrial gravitation and attracting living beings to its surface."

Clarkson further stated that he, personally, had "come under the baleful influence" of the full moon and avers that only quick thinking saved him from being "drawn irresistibly upward."

"I filled my shoes with iron," affirmed Clarkson, "and what is

more, I'm having a special pair made. There's something strange going on and I'm not going to be caught unawares."

When asked concerning the reason for the moon's untoward behaviour, Clarkson shrugged his shoulders. "I'm a student of occult sciences," he explained, "but I never came across anything like this.

"You'll have to ask the astronomers," he added. "But you can bet that from now on I'm wearing these iron-soled shoes whenever the full moon is out."

It is further worth noting that an especially long list of missing persons was read over radio station WNYC on July 4th and 5th, the reading taking more than twice the amount of time customarily devoted to this service and cutting in on a special music program scheduled to follow. Some of the names read were, of course, carryovers, but an amazingly large number of persons disappeared "on or around the night of July 4th."

On the night of July 4th, the moon was full.

Outstanding was the fact that near-

A Complete Novelet of Bitter,
Fantastic Conflict for the Pos-
session of the Earth and Its Peoples

By all who disappeared from the city of New York at this time were between the ages of 22 to make of it an armageddon which will in good health, were of more than average intelligence, and were proficient in some form of the arts. With the exception of a newlywed couple, all were single and—a fact which has apparently passed without notice—were engaged in a form of literary or artistic creation which required a highly imaginative cast of mind. One of the missing, for example, was an attractive blonde of 23, widely renowned among the devotees of the more imaginative and speculative of pulp fiction as an illustrator; another, a man of 27, was in the process of becoming a favorite in the field of fantastic, cosmic horror-fiction, the general type of narrative wherein Poe, Machen, and Lovecraft specialized.

None of the missing, apparently, had had any premonition of their impending fate; none left behind them any manner of clue as to the nature of their vanishing, nor has any word subsequently been heard from them. But recently I have spoken with an oldtime acquaintance who but lately left the care of a physician at a hospital for the insane. And further I have re-engaged in the study of a certain volume whose name is well-known to lovers of the weird and the fantastic. No, I have not burned this tome now that my studies are complete, but if at any time it has been my opinion that such studies are to be undergone only by those well fortified as to mental outlook, that opinion has been strengthened into a positive conviction.

THE incident which resulted in my decision to investigate more fully the happenings of the night of July 4th took place, by sheerest chance, on the afternoon of July 7th. I was conversing, at that time, with a friend in the 42d Street Cafeteria, idling over tall glasses of iced tea. A traffic officer, off duty, chose the table at which we were sitting and proceeded to take an old newspaper from his pocket which he looked over with considerable puzzlement. Then, becoming aware of its date, he laid it on the table with a look of chagrin. Oddly enough it was open upon the very page which gave the news-release I have already reproduced above. I glanced at my companion, indicating the paper, and asked if he had seen this item.

Upon noting our interest in the item, the

officer leaned forward confidentially. "You know," he said to us, "I came across something a lot like that the other night—I guess it was the same night. July 4th."

"You met someone with these same delusions?" I asked.

He shook his head. "Not exactly the same—but a lot like it. He was drunk, so I just helped him to a train.

"He claimed he saw people flying around the News and Chanin buildings. They didn't have any wings—they were just jumping up into the air. He says he looked up suddenly, and there they were leaping from the windows of one of the buildings. He was plenty scared, he says, but in an instant he saw that they weren't falling. *They were soaring up.* Like you do in dreams when you start jumping down a long flight of stairs and find yourself floating."

"Could he make any of them out?" asked my companion.

"He said they were all young people, some girls too. One was a pretty blonde, he said. They kept on soaring higher and higher until they were out of sight. Oh, I know he was drunk and seeing his own brand of pink elephants, but that story in the paper made me think of it. Funny how these delusions seem to run in batches, isn't it?"

(Extract from article in the *Solitarius*, official organ of the Initiates of the 4th Orbit, dated August, 1941.)

"Thus can there be no doubt but that the Truce remains in effect only so long as the balance of power between R and they of Y is maintained. But let this balance shift even for an instant, and the struggle re-ensues, for timeless are the contestants..."

"Yet mightier still than the contestants is the cosmos, through which wheel unconcernedly states of existing beyond our comprehension, and beyond even *their* power to control or negate. And, even as in the past, it comes to pass in the realms of outer space that which cannot but result in an eclipse of *their* control so that for a period of great indefiniteness to man, albeit an instant to them, the veil is lifted. Then can we who are to surpass rejoice and be strong in our freedom, using it as a means to learn how this momentary whim of the cosmos can become at our hands as permanent a law as shall be permanent the race of man.

"The forbidden book need be forbid no longer for the moment. Let it be

studied by those who are prepared, let it be searched diligently for that matter which they so dread our learning, that when the chance eclipse has passed, we be not found in our former state of helplessness, but can be fully prepared to fulfill the destiny of R, and with that, the destiny of ourselves."

THIS issue of the *Solitarian* was supplied to me by a friend to whom I had mentioned the incident of July 4th. In a letter accompanying the magazine, he stated: "What K— does not mention in his article is that the period of eclipse will find the human agents of *them*, as well as their messengers, more than ever active. In fact, since we do not know how long we have been in this period of relative 'momentary' freedom, it is possible to theorize upon the state of the world today and note what may be tokens of *their* interference.

"What, after all, has been the chief ban upon the forbidden book? The fear of what horrors might fall upon the student? No, certainly not that. Man has braved innumerable terrors before in his search for such knowledge as would give him mastery over the blind forces of this planet's 'nature.' There has been a deeper, more insidious means of discouragement, issuing forth from all manner of temporal authorities. In those days when the Church was the seat of human authority, then the task of preventing the study of the forbidden book was simple; those few who could not be frightened away by propaganda concerning the frightfulness of the *Song* and the dire fate certain to befall any who dared read therein, a doom hideous beyond the most grisly punishments man made law could impose, those paltry few were easily either tracked down and obliterated, or kept so far underground as to make their success a mockery of its purpose.

"With the rise of new social and economic orders throughout our planet, this authority waned, yet did it manage to impose its will nonetheless by controlling the sources of education. Far more clever than its dooms have been the authorities' campaign of classing the forbidden knowledge with primal superstition, ignorance, and unscientific folly. No longer is it said: read the *Song of Yste* and nameless monsters will descend upon you, or read this blasphemous text and ye shall be damned, but merely: study these things and the world will laugh at you for a fool and, if you

persist, regard you as insane. This, my friend, is the most effective and dangerous weapon *they* have yet used.

"Still, I think it is clear that even so *they* do not feel secure. Perhaps *they* were aware of the coming of the eclipse. And surely *they* must have realized that even so artful a dodge as this last could not endure long; every new social order brings with it a culture more fearless than that which crowned its preceding order, every new social change brought with it a casting-out of tabus and a re-examination of so-called 'self-evident' or 'eternal' truths. Thus it could not be long before an awakened and united planet would decide that a thorough examination of the forbidden book be made—not as directly as we would suggest it, but in an attempt to understand the past, and to see what kernels of new scientific discoveries might be found therein. Regardless of the precise manner and motive of this examination, it is clear that *they* dread it.

"Why, you may ask? It is quite obvious, my friend. The 'forbidden' holds secrets which would enable mankind to attain heights *they* fear. Remember the Prometheus legends, which, in one form or another, can be found in every mythology. The gods saw in man that which would eventually surpass them, thus determined to keep man unaware of his power, and in a state of such relative helplessness that it could be hoped he would not long survive. Prometheus feared not man, but recognized that it was the law of all that is that someday the gods must be surpassed, so forbore to harm man, and sought rather to give him aid. Then the other gods made it unpleasant for him (Prometheus)—but, in no legend is it implied that they were able to kill him. They all have some form of improvement, with or without eternal torture. Some legends state frankly that some day Prometheus will free himself, and take sides against the gods in the final struggle ending in their being overthrown. Call Prometheus Loki, call him—or, rather, it—R, but the essential factors remain: the eternal flux of the cosmos decrees that nothing is eternal, that all that is constantly changes from one form to another, that each thing carried within itself the seed of its own surpassing. (And recall that in all legends, the gods are supposed to have created man themselves, after their own fashion. 'In their own image' is, I think,

a bit too liberal and conducive to conclusions which do not follow.)

"Consider then the struggle now taking place throughout the world. It is the struggle for a new state of man's being against which are lined every force which would, if permitted, put a halt to human progress. The clock, as the saying goes, would be turned back; superstitions of all kinds would be reinstated, culture as such would be stamped out, and further search into the nature of the cosmos prevented.

"What could be more desirable to them than the world-triumph of these forces of barbarism, against which so many nations are pitted?"

"It is my belief that a planet-wide network of their agents has long existed, and, while it is not to be inferred that the conflict between the old and the new is entirely of their doing, yet there can be little doubt but that they have greatly augmented it and seek, by constant quantitative changes to make of it an armageddon which will completely wipe out the human race. Only after such an event can they feel safe—though, ironically enough, the extinction of man would not ensure their eternal safety at all. It might delay their surpassing, but would mean only that some form of being other than homo sapiens would replace them."

"Yet, man is not to be considered entirely helpless against them and their agents. The titanic forces of R can be enlisted if only it can be reached, and the Truce ended."

AT THE time this letter was received, I felt a considerable dismay in that much of it was unintelligible to me, for I had been little more than a dilettante in my pursuance of the elder lore. I had, in fact, read a few of the tales of classic horror, written some more or less precocious speculations regarding them, and written a letter or so to a muchly-famed student residing in Providence, Rhode Island. He it was who had been the source of what little knowledge I possessed, and I had permitted my correspondence with him to lag; now, I could not be sure if he were still available at the old address.

Something very akin to intuition told me that if anything was to be learned from an investigation, I must commence immediately. My first thought was to write to author

of the letter quoted above, frankly confessing my ignorance, placing such data as I had uncovered at his disposal. But a re-examination of this communication revealed a postscript I had overlooked, stating that he was embarking on an extensive journey the very next day. He made no mention of his purpose or destination; one road was already closed to me.

The identity of "Y" and "R" puzzled me. That I should know them was more than evident. Obviously the writer considered this knowledge so elementary that he did not bother to refer to the principals by other than their initials.

The thing to do then, clearly, was to contact Jeffry Barr, resume my correspondence. With this decision came a degree of caution: I would not at once bring up the subject dealt with in the other letter, but merely arouse his interest by sending him the newspaper clipping, and recounting Traffic Officer Kearns' testimony; Barr might be able to cast a good deal of light upon the phenomenon if it were, as I suspected, not an isolated occurrence, but merely an incident in a struggle as old as man. It was with more than a little excitement, therefore, that I opened a thickish envelope, some days later, addressed to me in Barr's minute handwriting.

CHAPTER II

“YOUR letter was most welcome, I assure you," he began, "not only because of the extremely interesting material you have found, but fully as much for its indirect admission that you have not as yet been swallowed up by any of the grisly horrors, or fallen victim to more mundane dangers. Just why so many of my sporadic correspondents apparently become stricken with coyness in regard to writing me frequently, I have never been able to ascertain; I feel much like the cartoon-comic strip villain, gotten up in generally repulsive attire, who leers down upon the quivering mass of feminine pulchritude that is the heroine and snarls 'why do you fear me, Nellie.' Only, my dear fellow, even though I may not be as handsome to behold as yon villain, nor do I sport such glad rags, I never snarl at people and am really as gentle-mannered an old codger as you could find anywhere. You would never suspect me of harboring

dire secrets in the recesses of my cranium, but rather expect me to burst out with Ciceronian rhetoric upon little or no provocation, indulging in endless and learned exposition of the most dull and boring nature imaginable.

"Please humor me, therefore, and do not let so great a period of time pass before writing again; you strike me as being much like myself in that you are much more facile (probably) with the pen than in dealing with the spoken word at close range. Of course, nothing will ever be done in the way of genuine communication between humans until telepathy has been perfected and every person can transmit by merely signalling the brain-wave of the party of the second part and awaiting an 'all clear' signal.

"The phenomenon of July 4th I find of particular interest, because it is in so many ways parallel to former occurrences. I'm enclosing a batch of clippings which you may keep if you like (I've had photostats made of them, and these are carefully bound into my own books), although if you have no use for them, I should prefer their return to their destruction. Some of them speak well enough for themselves, but a number require amplification, and suitable allowances for journalistic distortions of the facts.

"I suggest we discuss them in order of date. The first, you see, is dated 1917; at that time, war news was the main interest of the day, so the incident was dismissed rather brusquely. However, I delved more deeply into the matter."

CHILD'S FLIGHT BLOCKED BY PARENTS

Saybrook, Mass., November 3—Angela Ricci, 9, of Vine Street, will not be allowed to do "any more of this flying" say Mr. and Mrs. Carlo Ricci. Neighbors have confirmed Mrs. Ricci's contention that Angela had been "jumping as high as eleven feet" during the past few evenings.

When questioned, Angela said she wanted to fly to the moon. "Like Clara Scott," the child added. Investigation disclosed that a Miss Clara Scott of Clason Street had often shown interest in Angela.

"Clara said I could fly if I wanted to," insisted the child repeatedly.

A physician recommended that An-

gela be watched carefully, but that no further reference to her "flying" be made.

"I chanced to be visiting friends near Saybrook at this time," continued Barr, "and made a bit of an investigation of the matter myself, playing the role of an interested specialist—and perhaps misrepresenting myself somewhat. While I expected that the newspaper accounts would prove inadequate, I was not prepared for the amazing degree of indifference and sloth actually shown.

"It was necessary to sift out a good deal of superstition and general witchcraft theory from the data, but what I found was this: Angela had been observed leaping amazing heights and distances, just as in the account you sent me. She did not have to run any great distance, although a little sprinting did seem to help. But by merely standing still, the child managed to clear an easy eight feet. (Her weight at that time was a little more than normal.)

"On the night of November 2, Clara Scott disappeared, and I believe has not been seen since. No immediate report of it was made inasmuch as her uncle, with whom she lived was apparently engaged in illegal practices and did not dare call in the police. He told inquiring friends that she had gone away for a visit, but admitted to me, after I had produced the necessary money to make him talk, that she had *flew away*.

"The man was beside himself with terror, not only because of his dread of the law, of being accused of a murder he did not commit, but also of being thought insane. Scott was no fool: he realized what would happen if he told the truth.

"The moon was full on November 2, Scott related, and he had gone up to the roof for a purpose he did not mention (nor did I inquire). He was astonished to see Clara standing near the edge of the roof at that time, her eyes apparently fixed upon the rising moon. She was rather flimsily dressed and his first thought was that the girl (she was 22) might be walking in her sleep. He tried to creep up on her, but before he could do so, she suddenly leaped forward and upward.

"He says he cried out at that, expecting to see her fall to her death on the rock pile below, but she continued to soar up-

ward, moving her arms slightly as if swimming, until she was out of sight.

"Angela Ricci's 'flying' consisted, on the other hand, of mere leaps, although one person thought they saw her moving her hands in mid air, in the same manner as did the Scott girl. But Angela was prevented from leaping before the moon was fully up—a few days later, her parents said, the girl had apparently forgotten the entire incident completely."

THE next items were dated 1920.

"SECRET WEAPON" ON THE MOON SAYS WRITER

Haverhill, Maine, August 9—Claiming to have seen conclusive evidence of a "secret weapon" on the moon, Arthur Innes, amateur astronomer and feature writer, stated that he would shortly be sending a full account to the U. S. War Department.

"It's fantastic," he admitted soberly to reporters, "but look at the utterly incredible things that have happened in the past. Look at aviation—a phenomenon which perfectly honest and capable mathematicians proved impossible.

"While I don't care to go in for speculation," he continued, "I wouldn't be surprised if the Germans hadn't solved the secret of moon-flight and were preparing bases for an attack upon the world."

When asked by a reporter just how he thought the Germans could attack the United States from the moon, Innes grinned, then continued. "It's not as impossible as it sounds," he said. "Don't forget that the gravity is considerably lesser there. Earth could easily be bombarded from the moon—they would not need much bigger guns than they used to shell Paris, or the British coast from across the channel.

"I mentioned Germans rather than anyone else," he concluded, "because history has shown that they are the ones with the ingenuity, perseverance, and fantastic ambition necessary to accomplish such a thing.

"But it could just as well be Martians."

ARE WE BEING ATTACKED FROM THE MOON?

(Editorial in the *Dorcas Independent*,

Dorcas, Mass., September 11).

We have heard no further comment in the nation's press concerning the startling discoveries of Arthur Innes of Haverhill, Maine, who last month announced that full details of his observations were being sent to the War Department.

If, as has been thought by many, Mr. Innes is no more than a crank, and his alleged discoveries fraudulent, then the public deserves to know it. Yet let it not be said with any justice that we are a nation of stiff-necked scoffers; Mr. Innes' contentions are fantastic as he himself admits, yet they deserve to be investigated.

Had it been claimed some years before the event that our boys in France would be slaughtered with poison gas, loud would have been the cries that this was impossible—no nation would stoop to such inhuman methods of conducting warfare. Yet we have seen the well-nigh incredible fact (incredible in this seemingly advanced age) in addition to the unrestricted torpedoing of unarmed vessels, carrying no contraband of war.

No, we very frankly are not tossing awake of nights for fear of bombardment from the moon; we do not think it will happen. But we cannot so lightly dismiss what could well be a possibility, since a bit of vigilance could easily determine and resolve the matter, we feel the public has the right to hear the final word upon the subject from competent authorities.

IS THE NEUROTIC INFLUENCED BY FULL MOON?

Fairview, New Hampshire, September 17:—That the age-old theory of madmen and the psychologically unstable being influenced by the rays of the full moon is not entirely exploded superstition, Dr. Allen Joris of the Fairview Sanitarium revealed today.

Dr. Joris based his statements upon the evidence of charts, extending over the period of four years, showing the varying degrees of unrest experienced by a group of neurotics under his care.

These people, Dr. Joris made clear, were not lunatics, but were psychologically unbalanced, undergoing treatment which would eventually return

them to their homes, fully competent to deal with realities. The charts showed a marked increase of unrest and neurotic tendencies during the full moon period.

At this period, Dr. Joris stated, there were several who showed signs of definite delusions—generally centering around a desire to fly to the moon, and a belief that they could leap off the Earth when the moon was high, and be carried upwards by some agency they could not name. After the full moon period waned, they returned to normal, and usually had little or no recollection of the actions and expressions.

"I could not obtain much information from these three sources," stated Barr, "Arthur Innes, to whom I wrote immediately, made no reply and after a few months, further letters were returned marked 'removed, left no address.' However, a Mr. Julian Klein, attached to the staff of the *Dorcas Independent* told me in an interview that his editorial was partly based upon stories of mysterious disappearances around the time that Innes' first statement appeared. To go into details would be repetitious: they merely duplicated the phenomenon of July 4th and 5th of this year.

"I looked into these cases myself and confirmed that five men, four women, and several children vanished at around this time, and managed to get definite claims of their having been seen leaping great distances from various parties. There seemed to be a definite reluctance to impart information, and inasmuch as my health was not good at the time, I was unable to make as full an inquiry as I should have liked to have made.

PARTICULARLY strange, however, was the disappearance of Innes, for I obtained several contradictory stories concerning it. He seems to have told some acquaintances of his intention to investigate the 'moon plot,' as he termed it, first hand, although at no time did he say anything about an interplanetary vehicle of any type. But one neighbor of Innes admitted to having seen an object in the sky on a certain night when the moon was full; it was moving away from the Earth and soon became indistinguishable. He went into the

house and got a pair of glasses, but was unable to find the object thereafter; he could not give a clear description of it, but said that it might have been a man, inasmuch as his first impression was that of a man falling. As he watched, waiting to see if a parachute would appear, it grew smaller rather than larger, and he realized at that point that it was departing rather than coming.

"Other neighbors claim to have seen Innes on Earth after the passing of the full moon for that month, saying that he finally went away a week or so later. In this regard, the person who saw the object in the sky admitted to having seen an individual in and around the Innes estate, but did not think that individual was Arthur Innes himself—there was a resemblance, but he was sure that the person he saw after the night of the last full moon was not Innes.

"Dr. Joris revealed that one patient escaped from the sanitarium at around this period and that all attempts to locate her failed. She was a young woman, of a generally ethereal build, and had given indications of being under the prevalent 'flying' delusion. In this regard, a friend of hers let me see some pages from a diary the girl kept—I managed to borrow them over night, and copied them down. Here they are:

"... perhaps not yet, not yet, even after these terrible months, for the power of Y is strong even though the moon waxes upon me. But I shall leap, leap to the distant sanctuary where we build our fortress and wait the day of awakening and be with Kim again.

"Oh the ecstasy, the indescribable delight—my whole being trembles at the remembrance of that night when together we leaped above the rooftops and rode the four winds. How silly was I, little fool, to be afraid and think of wickedness and the sin of witchcraft and the dread of burning. But that is the way of those of Y—bitterly have I learned their ways and I must wither here alone unless these heartless bars can move and the moon beckon again.

"No—not to despair, but to feign submission, to give the lie and the denial and walk the blind ways so that they suspect not and suffer me to depart from this confinement. We are all learning that, learning to pretend and feign we do not remem-

ber after the call has come and gone unanswered. Sometimes I think it would be better if we could dissimulate even when the rays beckon, but the ecstasy will not let us rest and we are helpless. Oh Kim, Kim, are you safe, my darling—if only you could be with me and reassure me that R will not fail us.

"I must make one more attempt, one supreme effort to act, as they call normal, when the call comes—just long enough so that I may slip out into the courtyard...."

The Kim, whom this woman mentions, had disappeared a few months before her confinement in the sanitarium—it was thought that the loss of her lover was the primary cause of her breakdown."

THE FINAL clipping was dated 1924. SURREALIST FILM RECALLS WEIRD MYSTERY

Marseilles, France, June 7—Jean Cocteau, author of the surrealist cinema "Blood of a Poet" told reporters today that one sequence in the film had its basis in an unexplained mystery of some years back.

In the film, the dreamer sees, through a keyhole, the macabre event of a child being taught to fly; a little girl is shown gliding up a wall and across a ceiling.

This was based, says Cocteau, upon the strange case of Mimi Jervneau, the Flying Child of the Circus.

It was claimed by the showmen that the child, in her sensational "flying act" was not supported by wires or any other artifice, and that it was necessary to weight her with heavy iron bells in order to attain the illusion of gliding over the top of the great tent.

Cocteau tells of the time he visited Madame Jervau to find her rehearsing with Mimi; he was struck, upon that occasion, he says, with the impression that the girl suffered from the confinement of the room, and the restrictions of the act. Madame Jervau mentioned something about Mimi's being permitted to "fly free" if she put on a good performance that week.

It will be remembered that Mimi Jervau and her mother left the circus at the end of the season and that nothing has since been heard of either of them. The Flying Child of the

Circus was never fully explained, although a number of alleged "exposes" have appeared in the more sensational journals.

"There have been many other such cases," continued Barr, "over the course of the last twenty-five years, and they seem to have slowly been increasing. The event of July 4th, however, leads me to suspect that the power of R is nearing an apex which will bring the hidden conflict out into an open struggle once more. Your studies should have made you well enough aware that we poor mortals are little more than pawns in this conflict, which is older than Earth or the galaxy we know—although the latest discoveries anent the birth of our planet indicate that not only our world, but all the other planets, the sun, and the visible stars were created at the same time—approximately two billion Earth-years back.

"It is impossible to attach too much discovery to this conclusion on the part of such unimaginative people as star-gazers, for it tends to show that R is indeed gaining mastery and some of the actual facts about the world and universe we know are beginning to filter through. Those who have studied the 'Song', could, of course, have saved these benighted plow-horses much trouble, inasmuch as the fact of the simultaneous creation of all known worlds is not only given there, in its clearest possible form, but is also prevalent, in one form or another, in all the myths, folklore, and religions come down from the ancient days. *And who is Prometheus but R?*

"The day of Y's power is not yet passed—perhaps it will last throughout the life-period of homo sapiens, but I am inclined to doubt it. Clearly the life-force is the great interference factor which will eventually surpass and do away with Y, and we, as a highly advanced life-form may well play a prominent role in the final conflict."

CHAPTER III

Upon finishing the letter I was torn between two desires. The first was immediately to sit down and write an answer, relating to Barr the full extent of my information. But a feeling of unease and unreality pervaded me, and though I tried several times, I found it impossible to write anything coherent—so

I gave way to the conflicting desire and went out, aimlessly, into the street.

It was a dampish, fog-ridden night, punctuated by rifts of spidery rain; the pavements gleamed in the wan effulgence of corner lamps; the smooth expanse of well-nigh deserted streets reached out lazily into the murky distance. Yet for all that, man and his works seemed very real and very close to me and I was grateful. I strode by darkened shop windows, occasionally pausing to eye some display, stopping at bookstores to scrutinize their wares in the halflight, smiling upon the cold hauteur of mannikins and the sardonic semi-leer of liquor shops. The buildings around me rose to unseeable heights, and occasionally a single rectangle of light peered down at me from invisibility. Now and then the whoosh of busbrakes, as the golden vehicles halted to discharge passengers, roused me from my partial coma, but this was very seldom and I let the night and the fog and the wispy rain envelop me.

Yet, for all the dreamy aspect of it, my thoughts purred deep within my subconscious. From past experience, I knew what would come of this drifting; suddenly a thought would come to me out of the depths of my being with the clarity of a bell note on frosty air, and I would thus have arrived at a long-thought-out conclusion.

Yet thus it was not to be this night, for I found myself suddenly leaning against a window, my arteries pounding furiously at what I saw. An antique show it was, a window filled with the loot of time, but what caught my eye was a large, mawkishly framed painting with the title lettered boldly thereon.

THE LEAPERS.

A strange and sombre thing that painting was, a thing to set the mind and heart afame, to fire the senses, saturate the nerves with half-glad horror. At the sight of it, when to my somewhat glazed eyes it clarified, I knew that here indeed I'd found a prize.

There was a lake of molten fire, fraught with such colors I had never dreamed a living man could mix—a hellish lake, yet imbued with such livid realness that the eye was captured and drawn toward it. There were mountains that were the nightmare symbols of a creator gone mad; there were trees whose sinuous shapes no thing of cellulose could take. Yet, these were but

the fringes of the picture, the mad decorations, for even more outré was the centre. It showed a company of men and women, all glaringly nude, leaping from a knolly prominence, leaping up into the star-litten sky. A passion and a dreaming and an ecstasy was upon their faces, and a beauty which made the lurid ugliness of their surrounding thrice revolting. Up into the blue purity of the sky they leapt, casting no glance behind them, toward an orb of glowing gold that seemed 'o be reaching out to them. It was a full moon, swimming in an aether of fairy blue which wafted down to mingle with the drab hues of the atmosphere, hues which became ever more murky as it neared the ground.

And the radiant leapers swarmed upward from a single point, diverging thence in a perpendicular thrust so that their flight was a representation of the letter "R"; and the tongues of the phosphorescent slime that licked forth from the surface of the nightmare lake, and the contours of the devilish mountains, and the abominable tentacles of the ghastly trees made symbols of the letter "Y."

Weak and trembling, I leaned against the glass, my fingers clawing for something upon which to hold. At length I regained enough composure to jot down the name and address of this shop, resolving to return the next day and purchase this painting. With difficulty I managed to flag a passing cab, and give the driver instructions, then sank back into the cushions of it, spent and quivering. I do not know how I managed to get out of the cab, and up the flights of stairs to my apartment, but manage it I did, and my last waking recollection was one of remembering that I had been able to discover no name signed to the masterpiece.

THE next day I lost no time in tracking down the antique shop and obtaining the unknown masterpiece. In the light of day, it was garish enough, but only by artificial illumination did the full power of it come forth. The dealer was apparently only too well pleased to dispose of it, and my somewhat handsome offer, under the circumstances made him eager to give me what information he could about it.

It had come into his hands about three or four months before, and had lain undiscovered in a back room until his fiancee, apparently a highly superstitious person, had

found it and urged its immediate destruction. This he had been loth to consummate, and he had managed to come to an agreement with the girl: he would display it in the window for a week, then if no one took it off his hands, consign it to the flames. Had I come a day later, he told me, I would not have found it.

About the person from whom he had taken it, along with a number of other, more orthodox paintings, he could tell me little. The man was not an artist, he believed—at least, he was not the person responsible for "The Leapers." Upon examination, he managed to find a name and address. I took it, thanking him with an extra bill, and made my way home, stopping en route to examine telephone books and directories.

My search was fruitless, and, after three days of intense labor, I had to admit failure. There was only one Harry Trevor I could find who had at any time resided on Joliet Place, and he had been killed in an auto accident some weeks before. I wrote to Barr that night, bemoaning my fate.

His letter in reply, however, was decidedly cheering.

"You are exceedingly fortunate in having obtained 'The Leapers,' inasmuch as I, and a good many others have sought it in vain for several years. The painter is one quite unknown to the world of art, a man named Carradyne. Little is known of him save that he is now under a physician's care. He is known to have painted four large canvasses, macabre to the point of madness: 'The Leapers', 'Seepage', 'The Lightning', and 'The Vanquished'. It was upon his attempt to display this last that he was committed to the sanitarium; only two people beside Carradyne are ever supposed to have seen it. One of them is a medical student, with whom I am acquainted, and he says that it cannot be described in words—that further, he is positive prolonged examination of it would crack the sanity of any man. He says that he himself underwent a nervous breakdown shortly after the experience of viewing, and was only restored to himself after prolonged treatment.

"'Seepage', and 'The Lightning', while extreme, are bearable, as is 'The Leapers'. I have seen them myself: they are now in a private room at a museum here in Providence, and I could arrange to have them shown to you if you can make a trip up

here (and I should very much like to see 'The Leapers' some time, myself: at the moment, my health is bothering me, and I cannot travel far from my gruel and my nostrums, but perhaps when this cursed winter is over, I may be able to drop in on you) sometime.

"In the meantime, I'll describe these two for you as best I can: you have a flair for vivid description which I fear is not shared by me; however, I'll do the best I can. 'Seepage' shows a village scene, numbers of men, women, and children in it. The colors are quite natural; the scene is normal except for the horror—an utterly hideous intrusion of viscous blackness, gobs and masses of it, apparently *oozing* through rifts in the sky. There is one cloud of purest white, from which the horrid stuff is also seeping. The masses are shown falling, some striking the earth, while one or two of the characters have become aware of the occurrence and are staring upward, their entire beings transfixed with horror. One young woman has been struck by a sort of splash from the grisly stuff and she is screaming, her body contorted so that all the sweet young curves of her are shrieking lines of fear. It is not a thing for ordinary people to see.

"'The Lightning' is a night scene. It shows another group of townspeople gathered on a hill during what appears to be a storm. Only the clouds in the sky are fearful shapes, and great bolts of lightning are issuing *upward from the ground*, clearly attacking them. The faces of the people are strained, but courageous, showing anxiety as they watch this weird duel. One great lightning bolt is striking a cloud and dissolving it; the rain is falling on the village below—the humans are not touched by it. But wherever the rain is striking, the outlines of objects seem to be wavering and melting away. I believe the symbols of 'R' and 'Y' appear in this one.

"I shall see if I can find any trace of Stewart Carradyne, but cannot offer bright hope of success."

Before I could answer, a postcard came with the following note.

"Luck is with us. Carradyne has been removed to, of all places, Fairview Sanitarium. (You will remember the establishment mentioned in one of the clippings I sent you.) He is still alive and, what is most important, can be seen, if the proper wires are pulled. I cannot make the trip

myself—the sawbones now has me confined to bed—but if you are able to make the trip, I think it can be arranged. Will drop you a note shortly as to details."

Yes, luck was certainly with us, for there was more than what Barr had to tell. Because I knew a Stewart Carradyne at college, a quiet, aloof chap, rather averse to making friends. But we had always gotten along well together, because of the community of our interests—and he was given to drawing highly imaginative and often terrifying sketches. He said that they represented dreams and memories he had; the last time I saw him, he had mentioned that he was going to try full painting in oils.

CHAPTER IV

THREE was little difficulty in seeing Stewart Carradyne after all. A few matter-of-fact questions to be answered, then I was escorted to a rather large, comfortable room and left alone with the occupant. Apparently the man was not in a dangerous state.

As he looked up, and a flash of recognition came into his eyes, I saw that he had changed very little. A bit grey about the temples, but otherwise the same, aloofly quiet person I had known years before. He arose and grasped my hand.

Some instinct told me not to waste time with amenities. I eased myself into chair he indicated, then came directly to the point.

"I found 'The Leapers,'" I stated simply.

He nodded, a faintly hopeful expression around his mouth. "Did it mean anything to you?"

"Much." I told him of the events of July 4th, and of what I had found since then.

He nodded again, swept his hand across his brow in the gesture I known in day ago. "I went too far," he said. "It was a mistake to show 'The Vanquished'. I knew well enough of the forces we face—yet, in a moment of weakness and pride . . ." his voice trailed off.

"But tell me," he continued, "what is happening in the world. Tell me briefly because you may not be permitted to talk to me long. When I came here, the forces of barbarism were sweeping everything before them."

"No longer," I replied. "The armed might of those who would turn back the

clock crumbles before a steadily growing opposition even as I tell you of it."

"Good. Then the time is not far off—you have studied something of it?—when the barrier will be broken and R can emerge."

"Wait," I interrupted, "tell me more—I know so little. What of the Leapers?"

He bowed his head.

"Martyrs, martyrs all. They must have all fallen by now. What desperate struggle these pitiful few waged out beyond the atmosphere against titanic odds can never be known. Surely none—or but a few at best—could have reached the citadel.

"Yet, believe me, they did not fall in vain, my friend. Even though their stand warned the enemy that the time approaches, they fell not vainly.

"When the time is come—and it may be soon, even within the period of our own lives—man shall leap beyond the barriers as never before, and shall play no paltry role in the final conflict. And when it is won, then shall we surpass even as the laws of the cosmos decree."

He went to the desk in one corner. "I have not been idle here: they let me have a number of my personal books, and I managed to smuggle a copy of the *Song*. I suppose it knows I have the volume, but it is prone to underestimate our strength—you see, I am not alone here. Remember the clipping?"

"Yes—but, *it*?"

"An agent of Y—whether human, or posing as human, I do not know as yet. In time, perhaps. "No," he anticipated my objection, "we are not being overheard. I said *it* underestimated us—*it* thinks that we can be subjected by the same methods that have been successful in the past.

"But let me read you a bit from the *Song*. This passage—not very long—will clarify matters considerably, I think. And your friend can give further assistance after you go—for despite all that I said about *its* failings. I doubt that you would be permitted to see me again."

"You mean something will happen to you?"

"Perhaps—that *it* will attempt to effect my 'natural' decease shortly, I do not doubt—but I am prepared—much better prepared than *it* imagines." He rummaged in the desk a bit, then drew out a sheet of paper. "Here we are. Listen carefully—"

HIS words broke off as the door opened and the gentleman who had been introduced to me as Dr. Joris stood in the portal, a faint smile upon his face.

"No, my friend," he said, "I shall not forbid your listening to Mr. Carradyne's work, nor to his reading it to you. In fact, I really owe you an apology for this intrusion. But bear with me, and let me say a few words before this continues."

He took a cigarette from his case, lit it leisurely.

"You are a highly imaginative person, sir. In a way, I admire you, partly because I am just a plodder, as it were, and even so socially desirable a profession as mine can become dull at times. When that occurs, I and my colleagues often find stimulation in the literary, artistic, or poetic works of such people as yourself.

"But I think you will agree that a stimulant can be overdone—can be carried to a point where it is no longer a man's valuable servant, but his master. That can only result in tragedy—tragedy such as I have often witnessed here."

His words, calm, spoken with a sort of kindly assurance, fell like leaden weights upon my ears. I think it must have shown upon my face. He smiled again, sadly.

"If you would care to see me before you leave, I shall be happy to talk with you; I have often enjoyed your writings." He bowed slightly and started to withdraw.

"A moment, please, Dr. Joris," came Carradyne's voice, somewhat strained but still calm. "You will undoubtedly be interested to know that I have found the key to the serpent rune."

Was I imagining, or did Joris start?

"I see that I have been a fool again," went on Carradyne, "but we mortals often are. You are indeed efficient; you have taken just the right approach to make my friend doubt me, make it impossible for my message to be effective.

"But you are at my mercy now; will you withdraw, or shall I chant the rune?"

Joris fixed him with an icy stare. "I'm afraid it is you who are under my care, Mr. Carradyne."

"You think I am bluffing! So be it then." And he began to speak, quickly in strange accents, in a tongue full of sounds I never imagined could come from a human throat. Joris stood stock still, but I noticed that his left hand was making odd motions.

And a chill was stealing into the room,

an unreal chill, a coldness not of this earth—it seemed that the room was beginning to fade from my view and that the two stood at grips with each other in empty space. Louder and more powerful grew the accents from Carradyne's lips and now Joris was indeed making gestures with his hands, and counter-accents were issuing from his lips. A roaring began to fill my ears, a roaring as of titanic winds screaming out of the depths of space; I shuddered as space around me rocked with thunderous discords until at last a shrilling that nearly burst my brain asunder threw me down.

When I opened my eyes, Carradyne was bending over me.

"Quick," he whispered, "brush yourself off before someone comes and it is thought that I attacked you."

"But—Dr. Joris—" I stammered.

"It is gone. No time to read you the statement now—remember this number: 2475—in the arky chapter—Barr will help you. In case we do not meet again, farewell." He gripped my hand. "Go now, go quickly, but do not appear to be in haste. And if you see anything odd outside the room, don't investigate."

I WISH I had heeded Carradyne's final warning. As it was, I managed to get out of the Sanitarium without arousing undue attention, but once in the free air I fled madly, down the long hill to the railroad station, and boarded my train on the verge of collapse.

No, I have not burned the book, nor have I told Carradyne, who was released a few weeks later, of the object I saw in the corridor just outside his room; I have not dared to see him. Nor have I told Barr of my intent, now that, with his aid I have read the chapter and learned how to answer the call that comes across the night of space from the sanctuary of distant Luna. But I can no longer walk the ways of this world peacefully since I saw that thing in the corridor, that empty shell, that perfect replica of the human being introduced to me as Dr. Allen Joris.

When the call comes, I shall leap up into the sky and know the ecstasy of the leapers, even though it may mean frightful destruction at the hands of those that guard the barrier. And if I fall what then, what then, since I no more can live with men?

Arky, send out your rays that I may answer.

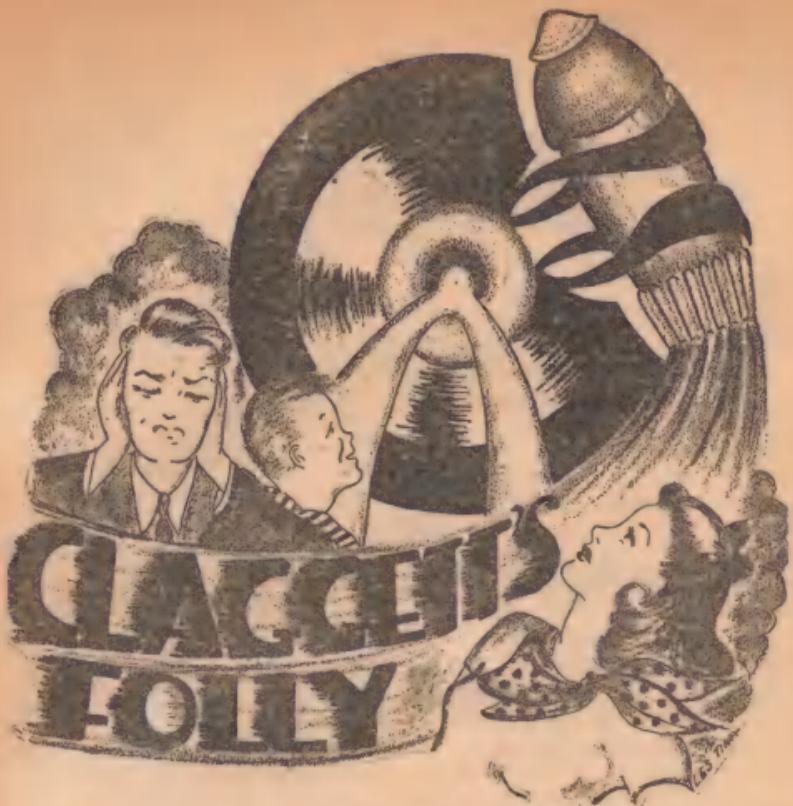


Illustration by Dorothy Les Tina

Claggett had too much money plus imagination. His nephew was a bug on spaceships — so that added up to a million dollar prize to the first ship to land on the moon. It was crazy and magnificent at the same time — but who'd have guessed the outcome?

I'M laughing. Who'd a thought it?

Twenty days and I haven't had a smoke. My pants are full of big, jagged tears, I lost my last shirt a week ago and my beard is three inches long. Somebody stole my shoes last night. They were awful and the toes were going fast and cracking on account of being walked around in so much in the rain, but they were

By Hugh Raymond

still shoes. As long as Claggett and I had our shoes we were the aristocracy. Claggett hasn't even got his pants anymore. A guy from South Brooklyn crawled over the Williamsburg Bridge just to steal them, he says.

Nuts, I say. An eskimo wouldn't have had 'em for a gift.

So I'm still laughing.

They'll get to us eventually, I hope. An airplane flew over at midnight, about two hours ago and Hank Schmerhorn thinks he heard New Orleans on that radio set he made out of two electric irons, a couple of empty tin cans and my metalastic suspenders.

Hear anything? Ha! All I hear are sparrows, cockroaches and a few garden snakes from Central Park. Sometimes when the wind is strong it rattles windows.

We can't see much. The horizon is still a couple of thousand feet high, a giant rim circling what used to be Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and parts of Staten Island and Jersey.

Thank god it isn't winter. Thank Heaven we have a few days' rations left. Thank the good lord we're alive.

Maybe Claggett won't be thanking anybody if he gets out of this. If the rest of the country is intact—parts of it must be because we haven't heard anything for days—folks who live there are bound to get good and sore at Claggett. His money won't get him out of this hole. Ha, that's a good one. Hole. What a hole. About four thousand feet deep. I guess they'll lynch him.

I can't sleep anymore, nights. That's why I got up and started writing. I'll go stark, staring nuts if the silence keeps up. The others are taking it easier. I attribute that to my long years spent drinking hard and

staying up nights. Don't do it, kids. If I get out of this alive, I'll—

Professor Hartman and Mrs Cloacher seem to be getting on all right. He broke his glasses a few days ago, so he can't see her face anymore. I'd feel more romantic about old lady Cloacher if I couldn't see well, too. As it is, everytime I get a flash of that pan I think of the Croton Reservoir on a rainy night.

Sandy Clitch and Olivia are doing O.K., too. She's a cute kid. Too briny for me, though. They have a lot in common. Me, I wouldn't waste my time looking at stars. I saw enough stars on June 10th to light up Madison Square Garden.

There's Hank playing with that damn radio. The kid's clever. If you ask me, I think he won. If they ever prove it, they're liable to lynch him as well as Claggett. The old boy's stirring in his sleep. His siestas are no cinch now. With a conscience like his, a baseball bat couldn't send me among the clover.

What I want is, nobody should blame me. I'm as innocent as an hour-old baby. Honest.

IT was all Claggett's fault. He had too much money after the war ended. Claggett's always been a sort of money magnet, of course. Gold grew under his whiskers. He couldn't wake up without realizing he was thirty thousand dollars richer. Every time he breathed, he made enough money to feed a hundred people.

Now that I think of it, I should have got him to take up exploring instead of astronomy. Oh, well, no use crying over spilt milk—my god, I'd give my pants for a cup of coffee with cream.

Claggett . . . I'll never forget the morning after the night when he'd

finished reading Verne's Trip to the Moon and a stack of old second-hand store magazines. He was lying on his favorite old couch—the one we brought from London—and looking up through the glass roof of our penthouse. Now that I think of it, he was sort of glassy-eyed.

"Hey, stupid. Come on over here. I got an idea."

"Treat it kindly," I cracked. "It's a strange place." He threw the Verne book at me and I ducked. "What's eatin' you, boss?"

I handed him back the book. It was pretty old, moth-eaten and cracked on the binding.

"Look, stupid. It says here that these guys went to the moon. The date in the book is 1865. Nothin' like that happened around then, did it?"

I had to smile. Claggett was a good guy, but he was awfully ignorant. I'd gone to school, so I knew that it hadn't. I said so.

They brought in our breakfast before he said anything else. He was munching an orange when he cracked again.

"It was a good book, sonny. You should read it. It'd improve your mind. It's full of wonderful stuff about flying off the earth. That other stuff"—he put down the mangled orange rind and pointed to the yellowed stack of pulp magazines on the rack beside his couch—"is better. More exciting."

I snorted. I mostly read the Journal and Pop Jink's racing sheet. So did Claggett, of course, but for some reason he was beginning to get snooty.

"Did anybody ever get to the moon?" he asked.

"Of course not, boss. We'd a heard

about it by now, if they had. Goin' to the moon ain't an overnight jaunt to Poughkeepsie."

"Well, why not. I suppose there's a lot of emptiness out there. Nothin' really interesting."

"There's meteorites," I said, proudly, "and a lot of vacuum and planets and moons."

He sat up and rubbed his unshaven chin.

"It's good stuff, even if nothin'll ever come out of it. Say, stupid, that's funny. The way they write about travellin' around in space out there you'd think it was a cinch."

"It ain't." I replied with conviction and picked up one of the magazines. I leafed through it for awhile.

Claggett was still thinking when I got back to breakfast which was a record for him. The longest time he ever spent on anything before was a race at Jamaica where he was backing a horse owned by one of his factory foremen. The nag had two bucks on her and a sway back besides. But then, you never could figure Claggett.

"I dunno," he said, and looked up again at the early morning sky. "What's keepin' 'em from doin' it?"

"Money," I replied briefly.

"There's lots of it lyin' around," he said sort of slowly.

"Listen, boss, it's this way, as my sister Mamie's kid Joey was tellin' me one night last week. They're spendin' too much money on other things. Guns, for instance. That kid's plenty smart, though a mite queer in the noodle if you know what I mean."

"Yeah, the kids today are too damn smart. It ain't like it was when I was a kid. Say, could you get that Joey over here this afternoon?"

I looked at him funny sort of, for a while.

"Sure," I replied, keeping my curiosity well down. "What do you want with the kid?"

"Nothin'," he said, then looked up suddenly. "I'll tell ya about it later.

Ipicked Joey up in the Parade Grounds at Prospect Park. He was attending an air meet thrown by some paper or other and flying a small rocket-driven—so he said—model that was beating everybody else hollow when I bribed him away.

"Where we goin', Uncle Hymie?" he asked, suspiciously, but the five dollar bill I shoved into his mitt quieted him down. I breathed easier. But then, money is the best grease there is.

Claggett tried to get Joey to sit on his lap when we got out of the elevator and into the penthouse. He's a born father and it's a shame he hasn't got hitched yet. But the kid wouldn't. Said it was sissy stuff.

"O.K.," growled the boss. "Sit down here, then," he said, pointing to a glass and steel and rubber thing he kept by the couch. I lit a cigarette and stood by the door leading to the roof-garden.

"Kid," continued Claggett. I want some dope."

"What about?" asked Joey. He looked around the room and spun his cap in his hand.

"Hymie here tells me you know somethin' about space ships and stuff like that. You know. Black Hornet and Hyperman."

"Yeah."

"The stuff looks practical. What's keepin' 'em from really doin' it?"

I've heard stories about child geniuses. But there was nothing like Joey in 'em. He talked for about a half hour straight, using words so

big you could weave a rope out of 'em. When he finished, Claggett gave him ten bucks, a platter of sandwiches and told him to get the hell into the other room and finish 'em there.

"Well," I asked, smoothing out my new doubled-breasted jacket. "What gives?"

"Whew!" he leaned toward me. "The kid's hot stuff," he breathed confidentially. "He's convinced me. I'm goin' to do it."

"Do what?"

"Start somethin'. I wanna be useful, stupid. I got a lot of dough and nothin' to spend it on."

"I could use a raise in salary," I began, hopefully.

"Shutup! Now, listen, I'm goin' to offer a grand prize for the first guy that lands a shell—or a pro—projectile" he finished triumphantly, "on the moon. There's nothing like a little pump primin' to start a gusher."

"You're nuts."

"O.K., I'm nuts. I'm goin' to offer a prize of one million bucks to the first guy that does it?"

"WHAT? Joey told me one of those things would cost a hundred grand if it cost a plugged cent."

"Yeah. The kid's clever. He knows all about 'em."

"Who's going to put up the iron men, the kopecks, the cartwheels, the sawbucks?" I asked, a little weak, suddenly, in the knees.

He swelled up like a pouter pigeon until I thought he was going to bust.

"I am," he said and I caved in.

CLAGGETT got his lawyer on the wire and down to the apartment in less than an hour. He spent two more hours arguing with the guys and a couple of times I had to step in to keep the little law fellow from

being laid out flat. He talked Claggett blue in the face trying to convince him he was crazy, but it didn't do no good.

The next morning every paper in New York carried a full-page advertisement giving full details on the boss's new pet project. A few hours later we had to call the police to avoid being killed in the crush. After all, just so many people can get into any apartment.

Briggs, Claggett's lawyer, kept arguing with him for the whole two weeks during which the boss was picking out the people he thought were competent for the job. The lawyer told me later that he'd never seen so many insane people in one place at one time, barring no asylums. I was ready to agree with him.

The boss did get one guy with a title. Professor Hartman. The others he picked mainly because he liked 'em. When Briggs tried to interfere and get Claggett to take only real experts on the subject, the boss said that most of the experts he'd known couldn't hold a candle to any good rule of thumb man who went by experience and not by the stars. He was a man of the people, he said, and only the people were competent to do the job, considering that most geniuses started out poor anyway.

The others were a Mrs. Henrietta Cloacher from Onapawsaukee, Kansas, who had some nutty idea about a space gun; Sandy Clitch, a young Rochester, New York, man, a nice ambitious young fellow, and a snooty intellectual named Olivia Obrien. They were all as wacky as a bedbug except for Hank Schmerhorn, a Brooklyn boy who seemed to have something on the ball. Professor Hartman looked down on the rest of 'em, but Claggett didn't care. He swore especially by Hank who'd

worked in a machine mill for three years and talked what he called "universal mechanics" as though only he knew what it was. I guess he did.

Joey had a slice in the money allotment too.

I never saw money disappear so fast. Mrs. Cloacher got her space gun built in Florida. That took two hundred and sixty thousand bucks and six months. She said she wanted to fire it off from Florida because since Verne's projectile had started there, it was a good omen.

Sandy Clitch and Hank Schmerhorn got together after awhile, pooled their ideas and had a rocket built. It was pretty big and stood about a hundred feet high in the backyard of the Brooklyn Iron and Kettle Works where they put it together. The rocket wasn't so expensive by itself, but Claggett had to shell out an extra twenty grand or so to clear the surrounding neighborhood which was a slum so that nobody would get killed when the thing took off.

Olivia Obrien — who liked me pretty well for awhile—got Claggett to hire a couple of German and Czech atomic engineers who went to work immediately and turned up a few months later with a small metal ball pierced with about fifty portholes that looked like that fellow Beebe's bathysphere I think they called it. Olivia was really something. She spouted big words by the hour and kept me going to the Science Library for tomes on electronics and other deep subjects. She was class. I even liked her glasses.

The Professor, who was particular about keeping a swindle sheet—he called it a budget—had a funny machine constructed that combined all the features of an airplane, rocket, submarine and automobile. I asked

him once where he expected it was going to have to swim, but he gave me a hard look and I never asked again.

Joey's contraption was really stupendous. He'd read somewhere in one of those pulp thrillers about a big revolving wheel with a space-car attached that threw the projectile into space when it was going around fast enough. It was the most expensive item of the lot and cost five hundred thousand dollars in all, requiring special foundations, castings and location.

WHILE all this was going on, the press and the public howled. I can't remember a day when somebody didn't point me out on the street as that stooge of Claggett's who ought to be in an asylum. It was hell, but I liked Claggett and my wages too, so I stuck.

The boss decided that all the machines would start off at the same time, first one of 'em to hit the moon to win. We arranged to have immense charges of explosives planted in the noses of each of the space-cars so that when they hit, nobody sitting at a fairly strong telescope could mistake it. Each explosive was provided with a special coloring treatment so that whatever machine it was that smashed up first could be detected.

It was a fancy send-off. The boss fixed it so that the various machines would be set off at once by pressing a golden key in his apartment. He threw a big party the night of the send-off and when it got to be time he was pretty much under the weather and not so anxious to start them himself.

So Hank did. And his finger never quivered once.

All kinds of hell were raised when those things got under way.

Mrs. Cloacher's cannon exploded and blew a large section of Florida development to fine powder. The shell, however, continued on its way.

The Professor's combination, all-purpose machine got off to a fine start and didn't singe more than a hundred eyebrows. But then, he'd warned people about standing around so he couldn't be blamed.

Olivia's metal ball just floated up and away from earth taking about five minutes to disappear. People really fainted and jumped out of their corns when they saw this one.

Claggett was sore when they told him he'd have to spend more money on Sandy's and Hank's rocket. He figured it was going to cost him an extra three hundred thousand to replace the Brooklyn Iron and Kettle Works which disappeared when the rocket whoosed away.

The only failure was Joey's high-speed ferris wheel which broke away from its moorings on the artificial island they'd built for it in the Hudson just when it was approaching its greatest speed, skimmed over the river and jumped hell for leather into the Jersey mud flats where it made an awful hole and some salvage.

There was some argument about whose projectile hit first as coincidence would have it. Olivia's ball blew hell out of one side of a mountain on the moon. The Clitch-Schmerhorn rocket landed in what they told me was the Sea of Serenity, although up till then I was under the impression that the moon was dry and made a terrific ruckus. The Cloacher shell did a few nasty things to the Tycho Crate at the top of the moon and Professor Hartman's collapsible, universally useable super-duper machine apparently started a

volcano going which fact had the New York science bugs astonished clear down to their toes.

Eight hours after the arrival of the projectiles on the moon, they were still arguing hotly away in our penthouse apartment. It was ten in the morning and Claggett was hoarse from shouting them down. He called

WITH HUNDRED-FOOT LONG EXPLOSIVE PROJECTILES. ALL CITIZENS ARE WARNED IMMEDIATELY TO EVACUATE CITIES AND TOWNS. YOUR GOVERNMENT . . ."

A high whining sound broke from the loud speaker as the announcer was suddenly interrupted, then came

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for breakfast at last and threatened everybody with a quick death if they failed to shut up. While he was eating I turned on the radio.

"Madam," said the Professor to Mrs. Cloacher, "you are as batty as a woodtick, dippy as a cockroach. My splendid machine struck our satellite first!"

Mrs. Cloacher made a strange choking noise, but subsided and started eating her fried eggs.

"ATTENTION! LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!" bawled the radio, in tones loud enough to roll the boss off his couch and onto the floor. "CHICAGO AND ST. LOUIS HAVE BEEN COMPLETELY DESTROYED BY GIGANTIC EXTRATERRESTRIAL PROJECTILES ORIGINATING ON OUR MOON. ALSO ATTACKED AND PARTIALLY ANNIHILATED A FEW HOURS AGO WERE ATHENS, GREECE AND TIMBUCTOO, EQUATORIAL AFRICA. REPORTS FROM THE CENTRAL OBSERVATORY IN ARIZONA INDICATE THAT THE SPACE BETWEEN THE EARTH AND ITS SATELLITE IS ALIVE

a tremendous blast, followed by complete silence.

Everybody jumped to their feet, including Claggett, who looked suddenly away at the far horizon and screamed.

"Look!" he screamed, leaping for a telescope, which since the new brain wave had been thicker around the house than dust. I got one myself in the general scramble and levelled it out the window and down the bay. From our vantage point on the roof of one of the city's tallest buildings we could see more than twenty miles down the coast.

I remember that one big chill froze me solid as I clapped the eyepiece to my right eye got a good look at what was advancing up the coast and into the bay: screaming, whining, a cloud of big steel cylinders, pointed at the ends, plopped into the ocean off Sandy Hook like a burst of shells from a machine gun and sprayed their way up the bay and into the Narrows.

When they began hitting solid ground there was an awful lot of noise and life has been hell ever since.

\$100 PRIZE CONTEST

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Best Story Contest

Conducted by

Hugo Gernsback

former editor and publisher of

AMAZING STORIES

and father of
science fiction magazines

DURING the past 5 years, the publishers of FUTURE FICTION, SCIENCE FICTION and SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY have printed many excellent stories, testified to by the thousands of letters which have reached us during the years from science fiction fans all over the world.

There have been many outstanding stories, some of which have made a deep and lasting impression on you. With pardonable pride, the editors would like to know which of these stories impressed you most, and which were the best stories we printed. What is more, we are willing to pay for this information and the results will be published for the record.

Here, then, is a very simple prize contest. All you have to do is to write a letter choosing 10 of the stories which you have liked best. List them in the order of your preference. Make a list of not more than 10 stories, then, underneath each one of your selections, tell us why this story impressed you most — in not more than 25 words.

Here is a sample showing you how to proceed. (Name of the story and author are fictitious in this example.)

1. The Phantom of Jupiter by Donald Blank.

This story rates first because of good science and daring imagination. It kept me spellbound. (End of example.)

Then go on with the other 9 stories in a similar fashion.



Here is a simple
contest, open to
any and all
readers of
this
Magazine.



★ Remember — no stories are permissible in the contest which were not printed in one of our magazines; namely: FUTURE FICTION, SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY, and the old SCIENCE FICTION monthly. (note: FUTURE COMBINED WITH SCIENCE FICTION, and the present FUTURE FANTASY and SCIENCE FICTION are included when we list the title FUTURE FICTION.)

★ You may use long or short stories on your list, at your option — the length of the story in question need not be considered.

★ Letters may be typed or handwritten in ink, but not in pencil. Use one side of the paper only. Be sure your name and full address are on the page.

★ This contest closes January 31, 1943. All entries, to be considered by the judges, must be postmarked not later than that date. The decisions of the judges will be final.

★ The judges in the contest will be the following:

★ **HUGO GERNSHACK,**
Father of Science Fiction magazines

★ **ROBERT W. LOWNDES,**
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★ **HARRY HAMMOND,**
President, Columbia Publications

★ In cases where the same lists might be submitted by several contestants, the best explanatory notes will be considered by the judges and awards made accordingly.

★ Address all entries to

★ **BEST STORY CONTEST**
Columbia Publications
Suite 315, 60 Hudson St.
New York City



A monstrously with pendulous lips, mournful, idiotic eyes, bloated biped body, and flapping, batlike wings, emerged from the night.

THE ★ C R E A T O R ★ By Ross Rocklynne

An utterly strange tale of an entity that came out of the night of mind and being to confound Phil Graydon.

THE masked ball was in full progress, and from the terrace orchestral music sounded. In the shadowed part of the garden, Phil Graydon and Elaine James walked slowly among the rose bushes, hand in hand. A strange constraint had arisen between them, though each had known the other for years, and the girl thus walked along with a smile that had little meaning—or perhaps a secret one. On the other hand, Phil's face was set. He cast his eyes toward her frequently, but she was masked, as was he.

He did a strange thing. His bare hand lashed out toward the rose bushes and he felt the sting of a thorn raking through the soft flesh on the tip of his index finger. He said "Ouch!" in a surprised voice, before he realized he had done it deliberately. Then he showed the bleeding finger to Elaine. She looked up at him, frowning. "But why, Phil?"

He slowly considered the wound. He said, slowly, "Maybe you'd better take off your mask, for a while." She complied, sensing his strange mood.

He studied the soft, classically

feminine features. He said, "If I had created you myself, I couldn't have made you more perfect." He added carefully, almost formally, "I must have done it deliberately. I wanted to feel a physical pain. I wanted to make certain I was real. Then I would know the world was real. And I had a feeling of loathing, looking at you with your mask on, for the mask did not let me see you, but something that was everything else that was not you."

"But why should you feel that—that things aren't real?"

"Last night, coming from the depot, I had an experience."

"You say it so alarmingly."

"Because I remember it well. If you've got the stomach for it, I'll tell you about it."

"Please do, Phil."

He spoke slowly, and as he spoke, her eyes darkened.

"Everything went black, with a darkness unimaginable; yet I was able to see the nothingness that stretched around me. I had physical sensations, yet had no body. I felt no emotion but a consuming terror that went beyond emotion. I was on the verge of madness.

"I was mad. I said, in a perfect-

Illustration by John R. Forte, Jr.

ly normal voice, "Who was Elaine? Should I go on?"

He was silent. Her breast rose and fell. She said faintly, "Was there an answer?"

"An answer, yes. Somewhat in the form of an echo, hurled back from across the universe. The answer was a mockery. It said, 'Who was Elaine?'"

Elaine's eyes fell. She was afraid. She whispered, "And will it come again?"

TO THAT he desired to make no answer and they moved again toward the house, between the solid trees, under the solid, pendant Moon, the very distant solid stars, beneath their feet a solid eight thousand miles of lithosphere and nickel iron. It was then that Philip felt faint, unstable.

In horror he grasped Elaine. He perked out, "You are Elaine."

And shortly thereafter, he was transported with abrupt transition from his momentary heaven with Elaine to a peculiarly horrible species of Hell.

Flowers and trees and bushes made a trembling, shifting, running blur. The ground whirled. Gravity knew no law.

The solid mountain lowered in the distance, shuddered, buckled, sank. A thousand foot wall of water rushed from the ocean to fill the gap.

The orchestra in the ballroom did not sound like the orchestra of human beings.

A monstrosity with pendulous lips, mournful, idiotic eyes, bloated biped body, and flapping, batlike wings, emerged from the night, and said, clearing its throat, "I will be your companion throughout eternity."

"Who are you?" Philip Graydon's

eyes screamed, though his voice said nothing.

"I am Elaine, if you want me to be," the monstrosity gurgled imploringly.

It faded into its blurred, shifting background.

The universe pirouetted about Graydon. He fell.

ELAINES hands stroked his forehead. Her soft voice sounded. His muscles were relaxed, and he lay on the moist humus of the garden. The garden was intact. Above him was Elaine's midnight hair and her tearful face.

Music came from the ballroom. Couples on the veranda laughed. Philip Graydon said, "I'm glad you're here."

She whispered, her voice breaking, "What happened?"

"I think I dreamed again."

"And it was the same—as last night?"

"Yes. But more horrible. Last night the monstrosity wasn't there."

"What monstrosity?"

He avoided her eyes.

She said, "All right. If it was that bad, Phil. Phil, will you do something about it, for my sake?"

"Yes." He drew her down to him. He thought, "I'll never really see you again after tonight, Elaine. Never, never, never, never, never, never, never, never—" He stopped the thought.

He said carefully to Elaine, "I don't understand. I don't know what's going to happen to me or to you. But something is happening inside of me, something I can't stop. And there's only one hope."

Hope?

In his mind's eye, he saw the batwing monstrosity saying enigmat-

ically, "I will be Elaine, if you want me to."

DR. PETER FARJEON was dark, small, dynamic. He sat with professional laxity as Philip Graydon's story tailed to a conclusion.

"And you think it was real," he stated.

Graydon puffed on his pipe.

"I don't like the prospect of a psychosis. I'll admit it was unreal. I came to you because I wanted you to prove that to me."

"Your condition approaches a psychosis closely," said the psychiatrist bluntly. "Let's get to the root. You're willing to admit that what you saw or think you saw was impossible in our universe?"

"Certainly, in our universe. But perhaps I went across to a universe which doesn't exist according to our laws."

Farjeon regarded Graydon with the wholly frank expression which experience had taught him could be made to conceal certain thoughts.

Again he stated, "You have often felt that your surroundings, other people, the very universe were unreal."

"All my life," Graydon admitted. "But I've never felt that I was unreal. I've always had a strong sense of my own reality."

Farjeon nodded. He said, "Your dreams—we will assume they are dreams without quibbling—are the direct outgrowth of that strong sense of unreality. It is so deeply buried in your unconscious that if it were allowed to progress it would turn into a neurosis that would require years to evacuate. As it is, Graydon, you'll have to come to see me every day for six months. You're going to talk to me, about everything

you ever did. And I'd prefer you to talk about the little things. Because, back in your childhood, something happened. Once I can convince you that it is that something which cause your present troubles—"

And Graydon regarded him with a quiet smile and interrupted.

"It's no use, doctor."

"What?"

"You seem," said Graydon, "very unreal to me."

Something flickered in Farjeon's black eyes; alarm, panic. His voice was normal, although he knew that he was experiencing something that should send him to the brink of madness.

"This feeling has been coming over you while we have been sitting here talking?"

"It's been growing stronger every second."

Farjeon said tensely, "Start talking. When I say talk, I mean talk. Start from a prenatal memory if you have one. Follow your life from its start to the present moment. Talk."

GRAYDON'S pipe fell. He would never know what became of it. He felt an internal convulsion. He sat perfectly still. Sweat exuded from his body. His eyes felt as if they were bursting.

"I'm afraid it's no good, doctor," he said in a gutteral, hoarse tone. "It's too late. This thing has gone too far. For instance, you're turning into a sexopus."

Farjeon, who was turning into a sexopus, leaned forward, his eyes dilated and desperate and frightened.

"I'm turning into a sexopus?"

"Yes. Now you are no longer a man. You are entirely sexopus. And there's nothing I can do about

it." This last came in a tinny scream of torture, and Graydon flopped from his chair.

"You're a sexopus," he told Farjeon.

The tentacles of the sexopus who was Dr. Peter Farjeon waved in certain configurations which were the equivalent of speech.

"Certainly I'm a sexopus. You're a sexopus, too. Why should it alarm you?"

"Because I'm a man," cried Graydon with his speech tentacles, flopping away from the creature in the chair. He flopped across a rubbery floor. He paused in horror.

He lay on the floor, a bulbous mass, gleaming with a slime, his locomotive tentacles curling and writhing, his speech tentacles quiet. He was aware then that he could not get away from the horror in the chair, because he himself was such a horror.

He closed his quadruple eyes. Flashes of knowledge came to him, who he was, why he was here, what his place in this universe was. Much he knew that he did not know as a man.

Yet, he continued to reason as a man.

He thought, "This is another dream."

He opened his eyes.

The dream had persisted. Dr. Farjeon, the sexopus, had persisted. He had flopped from his chair, a basin-like affair radiating three spokes. He sprawled on the rubbery floor, watching Graydon with what Graydon knew was pity.

Slowly the speech tentacles of Dr. Farjeon moved.

"Will you let me reason with you?"

Graydon said, "Yes."

"Remain perfectly still. These

dreams are nothing. You have a peculiarly deep-laid neurosis—"

"You said that before. Then you turned into a sexopus. How do I know you won't turn into something else?"

Farjeon's quadruple eyes were unwinking. "If you want to prove yourself sane, follow my commands. Tell me about the dream you had just now. You said something about man."

Graydon had no trouble using his speech tentacles. They waved in the speech configurations.

"Yes, I was a man. I had been having dreams. Horrible dreams of another existence."

"Of this existence?"

"No. It was a jumble. It was entirely unrelated to this one. I was a man. I had come to you as a man—and you were a man—and I was telling you my trouble; when suddenly you turned into a sexopus."

"Ho! I turned into a sexopus. Suppose you describe a man."

Graydon described a man.

THE inner lids of the sexopus who had been a man closed. Graydon recognized it as a smile, unprofessionally derisive.

Farjeon said: "As two thinking, reasoning beings, we can prove to ourselves that such a creature as you describe does not and could not exist. For, you see, the man of your dreams is built on the principle that seven and four make eleven; or that ten and twelve make twenty-two. Therefore, we can dispose of man—"

Graydon's speech tentacles began to wave excitedly. "No, we can't. Because—my God—four and seven is eleven—isn't it?" He faltered.

"In your dream, perhaps it was. But in dreams, obvious fallacies are accepted as truth."

"Fallacies!" Itell you that even now, it is perfectly logical to me that four and seven make eleven; and perfectly absurd that it should make anything else. What does it make?"

"Twelve. And ten and twelve, by the Law of the Accumulative Two, make twenty-two."

"Twelve," said Graydon. "Twenty-four. My God. But how? Why?"

Farjeon was at a loss. He said: "It's an axiom, Graydon. The only means to prove an axiom is by the axiom itself—ah! Will you concede with me that zero plus zero equals one?"

Graydon said faintly, "In my conception, zero plus zero equals zero and nothing else."

"Ho! Equals zero, less than one? Come now. You can't mean that. Where, then, did our universe come from?"

"I wonder," Graydon said cynically to himself. He said: "Does the fact that zero plus zero equals one explain the creation of the universe?"

"Could anything else explain it?" Our universe is here. It must have had a beginning."

"Yes."

"Since its source could not have been material—for such a source would need a source of its own—that source originally must have come from nothing. Or the coalition of sufficiently large quantities of nothing. You have no trouble following me?"

"None at all," said Graydon, on the brink of madness.

"The principle is evident. The subdivision of the electron, the smallest particle possible, results in the creation of two quantities of nothing. Therefore, the addition of two such quantities to each other results in an electron, and the creation of the universe hinges on the Law of

the Accumulative One; and takes place in any addition of numbers under ten. Over ten, the Law of the Accumulative Two takes effect; and so on up. The law explains completely why our universe continually gains in bulk, and why it will continue to do so until it has reached that changeless state which scientists call—and aptly—Absolute Minimum Emptiness. Therefore, during the addition of seven and four, both under ten, a unit accumulates, and twelve is the— Mr Graydon!"

Graydon slid to the rubbery floor, writhing.

THE condition ceased. His eyes snapped open. He would have screamed had he been equipped with vocal organs. But he could not protest.

The batwing monstrosity flapped dismally at his side, pushing its wings against a murk that stretched to unlimited distances. And Graydon knew that, though there was nothing to set his motion relative to, he was moving with frightful speed.

He had no body.

Mentally, however, he could feel his teeth clenching.

He said, in the strange way that was possible for him, "Go away, you devil."

The wings of the horrible creature continued to flap.

But the eyes, piggish, yet filled with an infinitude of mournfulness, turn on him. "It is not right," said the monstrosity, clearing its throat, "That I should go away."

Graydon was filled with loathing. He said in his pseudovoice, "Which is the real universe: 0 plus 0 equals 0, or 0 plus 0 equals 1?"

The monstrosity turned its pig-eyes on the far distance, as if searching for the answer. It turned back

to Graydon, and spoke one word, and regarded him with the horrible promise of tragedy in its eyes.

"Go away," Graydon screamed, at last, throwing his imaginary arms about. "There's something about you that's awful—I can't place it—you disgust me—you exude a slime—where are we going?"

"To another place."

"You don't know where?"

"No, master."

"Why do you call me master?"

"Because I am to be with you forever."

"I don't want you to be with me forever. I couldn't stand it."

The bat wings flapped a little faster. "Yes, you do want me. Yes, you will be able to stand it. As soon," the pendulous lips promised, "as soon as you realize who I am."

"Who are you, then, you devil!"

"I am Elaine," said the monstrosity mournfully. "That is, if you wish me to be. And I know that you are longing for her."

Graydon screamed again, "Go away. You can't be Elaine. You never could be. You're—horrible. Damn you, don't ever come back."

The bat wings idled. The monstrosity fell behind and was lost in the murk. But his words drifted forward. "I will be back."

And then—

—facing Philip Graydon was another Peter Farjeon. But not exactly facing him. Rather, it was a condition which partook of equal quantities of facing, or being within, or without Dr. Peter Farjeon.

That which gave sight was a mixture of a brilliancy beyond calculation and a darkness past plumbing.

Dr. Peter Farjeon was a being of no size whatsoever, yet Graydon knew that he encompassed all the known universe within him, as Philip

Graydon encompassed all the known universe within him; and as he and Farjeon occupied each other, yet were set apart from each other by a peculiar quantity or condition which could be represented by the unthinkable word —.

“YOUR dreams are interesting pictures of the unconscious mind in action,” said Dr. Peter Farjeon.

Graydon kept his mind fluxless.

“Which dreams did I tell you of?”

“Of one, the universe of man. And your dreams seem to have a certain coherence. For instance, the fantastic universe you describe in no way disagrees with a most unique universal principle which, as nearly as I can make it out, you refer to as distance. Yes, perhaps out of those dreams may come the solution that will explain all the contradictions in our cosmogony. The theory of distance. And even your concept of time has intriguing possibilities, though both concepts flatly deny the rigidity of the law of —.”

Graydon, icily cold, led him on. “My dreams gave me a perfect picture of time and distance. But in my own—in the universe of which I dreamed, the mind of man was not capable of visualizing the concept of —. I myself knew nothing of it.”

“But now that you are in the true universe, you have no idea of what time and distance were?”

“On the contrary. I have perfect pictures of both time and distance.”

“You mean to say you can define the terms?”

Graydon said, “Before there can be distance, there must be at least two objects. Before there can be time, the two objects must exert a change of state on each other.”

Farjeon was distressed. "I do not comprehend that word which you call objects."

"We are objects. We are two objects."

"No, no!" said Farjeon, agitatedly withdrawing through the application of that quantity or condition known as _____. "We are—all. Graydon, this is something I do not comprehend. You have had a dream that is supernaturally real. I am beginning to think it was real. That this is another dream, yet real—a separate fiction in the minds of both of us, subject to destruction by both of us, yet retained by other minds, as the universe of man has been destroyed by you, but retained by other—"

"That may be true," Graydon agreed, and his mind retched and sickened and he was borne away with a terrible sense of speed and he felt beneath his non-existent body the coldness of a marble slab, and saw resting opposite him, wings folded over its bloated, disgusting body, the monstrosity who was to be with him always.

THEY stared at each other, Graydon with building horror, the monstrosity with a deep gleaming hope somehow shining out of its mournfully piggish eyes.

"Do you know yet?" it asked eagerly.

"I think there is nothing to be known."

"Yes!" said the monstrosity excitedly.

"On the other hand, there is everything to be known."

"Oh, master, that is equally true!"

The creature flapped its odorous wings once, and stood crouched a little, its white naked arms extended toward Graydon, a pleading, invit-

ing expression on its obscene face. "Make me," it gurgled imploringly, "Elaine!"

Graydon's stomach, where it should be, began to retch.

His face screwed up in wrath. His hands came out like claws. "You could never be Elaine," he screamed, and slashed out with his claws in terrible warning. The monstrosity vanished entirely, and abruptly another dream came to plague Philip Graydon.

He was running, without effort to this strange, indescribable body that was his, but with infinite fatigue in his man's mind. He thought that he must have been running forever.

Beside him another being ran, and beside him yet another, and there were others, as far as the eyes could see, abreast of each other in a straggling line.

They ran through a blazing sunny day, across a plain that was level and monotonous and deadening to the eye, and there was a horizon far away where a deep rosy light glowed.

Graydon turned to the being at his right, and said, "How long have we been running?"

The being looked at him curiously. "That would depend on how old you are, wouldn't it?"

"I've been running all my life."

"Naturally. Otherwise, you wouldn't be alive, would you?"

"I'm going to stop running," said Graydon with a curious smile.

"Am I supposed to be sorry? Or are you just being morbid?"

"Morbid?"

The being turned away disinterestedly. "If you want to stop running, stop running. Go ahead and disappear."

With a curious, twisted smile on his face, Graydon stopped running. The line drew away from him swift-

ly. The being to whom Graydon had spoken looked back in disbelief. This gave way to cold derision.

The runner said, "Already you grow smaller." He turned his head away, and kept up with the line.

GRAYDON stood still, watching the straggling line run toward the horizon with the rosy glow behind it. The line became smaller and smaller to his eyes, both in length and in height. The line of runners diminished and then vanished.

"They vanished to me. I vanished to them. My fate was no worse than theirs, though they ran and I did not."

His indescribable body sat down on the dust of the monotonous plain. For many hours he thought.

At last he raised his eyes. He who was to be with him always appeared from the grey distance, wings flapping dismally. It drew nearer, its small pig-eyes searching for relief on Graydon's face.

It cleared its throat. "You have not yet learned the truth?"

"No. Go away."

The idly beating wings beat stronger. The monstrosity went away without urging, and as it went, Graydon was in another universe.

Its laws were nothing that the mind of man could think.

Graydon emerged, and beheld the batwinged monstrosity again.

"Go away." The monstrosity thereupon went, and Graydon prepared himself for innumerable plunges into a chaotic group of cosmoes.

He experienced fabulous universes where the laws of the universe of man were as nothing. Always he emerged to face the batwinged

monstrosity. And at last he emerged forever.

EYOU cannot escape it now," said the batwinged monstrosity, wings folded about it, splayed feet standing on a substance, pig eyes looking at Graydon through vast darknesses. "At last you must face it. You have learned much. At last you know, and of that which you know, you have had irrefutable evidence."

"Who are you?"

"I am your Elaine, if you want me to be."

"I do not want you to be. You are indescribably awful. Elaine was everything that was beautiful."

"There never was an Elaine."

"I held Elaine in my arms. We loved each other. How could you be Elaine?"

"You made provisions. I am the symbol of Elaine. I am the inverted symbol of Elaine. Your reason struggles against your reason."

Reason struggling against reason? Where was Philip Graydon?

Was this Philip Graydon, standing here, in a certain place, on a certain substance, emotions gone?

But was all horror gone? He felt his thoughts being drawn into the whirlpool.

He said, "If Elaine was real, the universe of man was real. The others were actual figments, dreams. Otherwise, why would I long for the universe of man, which I conceive to be real and true, and not the others?"

"You builded too complete a picture. You permitted the universe of man to persist too long. Therefore, you have diseased yourself. And you created the inverted symbol of Elaine and I am she."

The maelstrom was whirling ever faster.

"I created you from my mind," said Graydon.

"By a power you possess, and yet could not know you possess. Therefore, I am you, talking to yourself. And I am Elaine, who was yourself, who is in turn all that is, and all that is likely to be."

Then the monstrosity stepped forward, crouching, white naked arms extended. "Make me Elaine. You have but to think the thought and say the word."

"I will never make you Elaine."

An overwhelming grief returned

to the pig-eyes. The monstrosity straightened. "You will never make me Elaine? Then you will never see Elaine."

It cleared its throat. "Never, never, never—"

"Stop," Graydon screamed. Then he panted, "Why did you say the word so often?"

"I wanted you to see the true infiniteness of never."

Graydon shook and trembled and

(Continued On Page 72)

BOOK REVIEW

"Out of Space and Time"

By Clark Ashton Smith, Arkham House, 1942, Sauk City, Wisconsin, \$3.

This, the latest of the Arkham House editions, is a volume which should make the heart of every fantasy lover leap for joy. Not only is the mere fact of at long last a collection of tales by one of the greatest of American fantaseers a thrilling event, but the book itself is a marvel of neatness, good taste in selection, and presentation. The world of imaginative literature is again indebted to Mr. August W. Derleth.

It is useless to try to determine which stories we liked best — they are all well-nigh flawless examples of Mr. Smith's impeccable mastery of style, beauty, and carefully controlled horror. Here the barriers of space and time are indeed swept away, the loves and hates of lost peoples reborn, the myriad spells of enchanters and present-day sorcerors limned into reality. For — despite the fantasy of it — the tale that Mr. Smith writes is breathtakingly real, the ultimate reality that lies within the human imagination.

Those who pass up this volume are our definitions of first-order goops.—R. W. Lewndes

(Continued From Page 71)
turned cold and from his lips came
the words.

"You may be Elaine."

IN THE place of the monstrosity stood Elaine, white and flawless and creamy and smiling. Her tender arms raised toward him, and she took a step. Graydon started toward her.

Abruptly, she was no longer there. The monstrosity held its arms out to him, smirking.

Graydon stumbled back.

"Elaine," he screamed. "Come back!"

She appeared again. She became the monster again. Graydon watched. Elaine came back.

"I am," said Elaine, "Elaine."

But again she was the monster taking a step toward him.

Graydon flung up a hand, finger outstretched as if to transfix the monstrosity.

"Get back. You were to become Elaine. You are all that is repulsive."

The monster said, "What promises I made to you were made to you by yourself. Therefore, blame yourself. If you do not know how to direct the power that will enable you to change me into Elaine, then you are paying for your folly in striving to retain Elaine, who belonged to the universe that diseased you, and no other. You tricked yourself into believing that in retaining me, the inverted symbol of Elaine, you were not retaining Elaine, and therefore broke no law. You gambled. But I am Elaine, for you have said so. Therefore, accept me as Elaine. Or redirect your diseased conception of beauty."

Graydon retreated from the advance of the bloated biped.

"You must be Elaine, nothing else."

The monster flickered into Elaine, turned back again.

Graydon waved an arm violently, as if he were commanding the heavens to split. He cried, "You are Elaine!"

Elaine was coming toward him, smiling. Then the monstrosity, smirking in triumph.

Graydon stumbled back, impelled by the horror he knew.

He hurled the full force of his maddening mind into his command.

And the monstrosity hurried toward him, arms outstretched, mumbling, "I am Elaine, master, you have wished it."

Of the real—the unreal—Elaine, there was nothing.

Graydon twisted his face into a twitching, diabolical mask of unholliness. His hands came out like claws and he shrieked,

"Go. If you be Elaine or the monster, leave my sight and my mind and let me alone with my emptiness."

HE STOOL in a certain place, on a certain substance. Of things other than himself there were none.

For a time he endured it, looking at the spot where the batwinged monstrosity last had stood. Then questions began to hum through his mind, and escaped through his lips.

"Who was Elaine?" he asked. The words were hurled back by a Cyclopean echo. "Who was the monstrosity?" The echoes roared and tripled and mingled stridently. "Who is Philip Graydon?" and though all the emptiness that composed the universe was Philip Graydon, he waited for an answer from some Being. Yet not even an answering voice was forthcoming with its repeated question, for no echo sounded.



THREE'S no doubt as to which story in the August Future was tops with our readers; Norman L. Knight's novelet zoomed up to first place with the initial set of ratings received, and, save for a few scattered bows, stayed there. After that, however, votes were pretty widely sprinkled around, as you'll note by the scores. Particularly interesting was the response to Pearson's "Ajax of Ajax"; a continuous battle raged around this story up to the last letter—some rating it the best in the series, others averring that Ajax had shipped this time.

THE cover was also a highly controversial point, drawing more comment than any other we have used to date. After the smoke cleared away, we find that our battle-scarred artist is still on the credit side of the ledger, but bleeding profusely from many slings and arrows—see excerpts from letters on the cover controversy below.

Now for the ratings:

1. Once in a Blue Moon	1.33
2. The Peacemakers	3.68
3. Washington Slept Here	3.82
4. The Slim People	4.31
5. The Air Whale	4.85

J. S. KLIMARIS' "Case of the Vanishing Cellars" and Joe Gilbert's "Twilight of Tomorrow" were almost exactly tied for 6th place, with scores of 5.13 and 5.14 respectively. Joe is in the Merchant Marine now, so we fear you won't be seeing him around until the present fracas with the various totalitarians is victoriously over—while Klimaris is heavily engaged in defense work and will have little time for Special Investigations; we can only hope that he'll be able to call Wilbur and Stevenson away from whatever vital snooping they're doing now for the Allied Nations to tell of some case, the publication of which won't aid the enemy! But on with your comments, and first we'll deal with

THE COVER CONTROVERSY

"Cover really good, this time," says E. E. Evans, of the Galactic Roamers, and George Ebey, of 4766 Reinhardt Drive, Oakland, California, adds "Forte will always be a *Flash Gordon*-esque artist, but when he's good he's better'n fair. And this time he was good. Spiffrsk to the tomato soup background, tho. It may outline the gal's legs neatly, but Norman L. Knight's name is hard to read."

"I see a big improvement in your art work," says James Russell Gray, of Box 204, Harts-horne, Oklahoma. "This Forte looks like just what the doctor ordered to me. The

cover on the August issue is good. Nice gal. I like gals. I believe the majority of your readers like 'em." However, Sol Eich of New York growls "At least you might have put Norman L. Knight's name so I could read it. I almost passed up the August issue, because of the cover. The dame was cute enough—to bad she was wasted, as a matter of fact—but that's the only thing that caught my eye. If it hadn't been for the *Irai* story, which I noted sheerly by accident, you wouldn't be reading this letter." Chad Oliver, of 3956 Ledgewood, Cincinnati, Ohio, has different ideas. "The cover, while not perfect by any means, is much better than usual. Forte will soon develop into an A-1 artist." And Murray King, of Greenwich, Conn., says "Why not feature the 'Forte girl' on your covers the way one of your rivals has featured the 'Mac girl'? While Forte hasn't always used the same model, apparently, his girls are all of the same general type, and an eyeful to say the least. The Blue-Moon gal is the neatest of the lot, and I'd sure like to see her again and yet again on your covers."

James W. Thomas of 134 Dexter Street, Valley Falls, Rhode Island, opens fire with "The August cover: Didn't they teach composition at the New York Commercial Illustration Studios? The eyes start at the left hand corner, proceed along some sallow green paving blocks until they are distracted by some canned salmon waving in the breeze. It is now a toss up whether or not to proceed to the head of the animal or take a short cut up the ray of the Martian's pistol. I take the latter and am thus spared the critter's head and the Martian's legs. Now we have 1. a man, 2. a Martian, 3. a maid, all ranged in a sedate row. How nice. Below them we have a mudbank. On the mudbank we have 1. the rare Schizophrenian Caligulensis, 2. the equally rare Myhowitzmells Doesntit and 3. the Martian Cabbage. These three plants are also in a sedate row. They always grow that way. They are symbiotic, simply cannot live without one another. They always come up in the same order. Hell!"

Finally, a word from Norman L. Knight: "Human nature being what it is, I am (a) elated that you illustrated my story on the cover (b) complimented that it placed in the same category as one of Ray Cummings' yarns—(c) gratified that Mr. Forte has made such a pretty girl of Rodney and such a fearsome beast of the Dinopod. This implies no disparagement of the other features of his illustration; I mean to say that these two pleased me most. Furthermore, it is evident that Mr. Forte must have given the

story careful study; he couldn't have adhered so closely to its details otherwise."

Thus, you see a sample of what the mail bag brought this time in the way of roses and high explosive, but there's more as we get into

OUR INTERIOR ARTWORK

Chad Oliver says "Forte's interiors this time were really well done, especially his pic for Grosser's 'Time Exposure'. The general appearance of this issue is somehow pleasing; an indefinable something that is very important in an SF magazine. It marks the difference between a passable mag and a good one. Future, after a long struggle, is at last in the latter category. What's more, I think it's going to stay there!" (And I hope you're right; if it doesn't, it won't be because I ain't trying. Ed.) James W. Thomas (We won't bother to give a reader's address more than once per issue, Ed.) remarks: "Forte's interiors this time were surprisingly good. The one on page 77 could be called excellent. It is reminiscent of Elliot Doid's work. Musacchia's work is childish and sloppy. Knight's pic was just fair because the new technique didn't reproduce well. Bok's job was excellent, what there was of it."

John Hollis Mason, of 78 Homewood Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, writes "The illustrations seem to be improving. Knight does a very nice job for the Blaiklock and Raymond stories in the June issue, and Forte is the best yet in the August book." James Russell Gray sums it up with "Inside pics are all right, but Forte is best." George Eben avers "The interiors for the Knight novelet are garishly adequate. Forte has a penchant for futuristic machinery and slick uniforms. However, he ought to draw all his humans in space suits—for obvious reasons. . . . The illustration for Gilbert's short is the best of the issue. . . . The chief difference between Forte and Musacchia seems to be that one draws his humans clearly and wooden, the other draws his humans fuzzy and wooden. The latter's drawing for 'Washington Slept Here' inspired a strong feeling of revulsion in me. . . . Don't know what to make of the Bok, but I liked the Knight illustration."

E. Evans says "Forte's pics good on inside; also Musacchia's. Enjoyed it all very much." Carol Grey takes time off to tell us "Your artist, John R. Forte, Jr., seems to have captured the essential feeling of science fiction just as Bok and Dolgov have done with fantasy. They all slide around when it comes to drawing people—but that shouldn't worry you. I've never seen a really fine science-fiction or fantasy illustrator yet who can draw people well. The issue may as well be skipped. Look at Frank R. Paul—an artist with breathtaking imagination and a genius for machinery, cities, alien scenes and monsters—yet most of his humans are laughable cartoons; look at H. W. Weiss, another fine science-fiction artist—yet his anatomy is weird to say the least. Elliot Doid has done magnificent pieces of science-fiction art, yet his humans are all waxen dummies. So when the question of humans comes up, I say file and forget!"

MISS GREY may have something there—but your editor, and I suppose a lot of you readers, too, are inclined to be utopians about this matter. We're still hoping to find an sf or fantasy artist who shows all the imagination and grasp of the

field as the masters, and who can also draw human beings.

Next item on the agenda is

THE AJAX ISSUE

John Hollis Mason expresses the general opinion of a good many readers when he says "Much as I like poor Ajax, he was outshone this time. The current bit is up to par, though." James W. Thomas represents the attackers with his viewpoint "Ajax of *Ajax*" was the easiest to place in the whole issue. There was only one place for it. After the excellence of the preceding stories in this series, this one was a dismal flop. It read as if it had been dictated between ham sandwiches in a half-hour lunch period. What is Pearson doing, resting on his laurels?" Murray King writes "Pearson's 'Ajax' stories are one of the many features about the mag which make me yearn to see it every month. The present one is eclipsed only by Knight's 'Once in a Blue Moon'. Particularly enjoyable was the opening paragraph, though the rest was no let down. Can't you do something to speed up more in this series? Keep the length variable, according to the plot, though. This one needed the pages devoted to it, while 'Destiny World' would have suffered from expansion. I'd say offhand, tho, that Ajax is best when his exploits are short and meaty."

SEEMS as if Ajax is away on some sort of modest vacation, in as much as Pearson tells us he hasn't been able to contact the Man of Destiny in recent weeks. However, you'll note Pearson hasn't deserted us. Vide our cover story "The Key to the Dark Planet."

THE cover, we might add, is by Robert C. Sherry, who has appeared on a couple of our contemporaries in the past. There's rather interesting sidelight on this drawing, by the by. Originally, Sherry had made the mouth of the claw-like object snapping at the girl without the saw-like teeth. Now, in actuality, that did not decrease its potential danger whatsoever. If you've ever seen, or had the misfortune to come into contact with a snapping turtle, you'll know what we mean. Teeth or no teeth, that machine could cause our damsel plenty of grief—actually more so than with the teeth it now has. But, the trouble was, that the doggone thing just didn't look deadly at first glance, being still-life as it was. So we had Sherry change it. But enough from our end; here is

JAMES RUSSELL GRAY

Dear Doc: At the risk of offending you I am going to say that *Future* was at the bottom of the list of science fiction mags, in my humble opinion. Notice that I use the past tense, however. A few days ago I bought the August issue of *Future* because I had already read all the other SF mags on the stands. For months I wouldn't even buy your magazine, you understand. I noticed the difference right away. Plenty of changes, all to the good.

The main thing I had against the old *Future* was its custom of running reprints. I'm agin reprints; I don't like 'em; I deplore 'em. They were all right in their day, but they don't, as a rule have the fast pace of the present-day story. I have been guilty of saying "Stories of today just ain't as good as they were twenty years ago." Then one day I dug up one of those old "masterpieces" that memory told me was

so wonderful. I didn't have to read far to see the light. I admit that a few of the old SF stories will hold their own with anything, but these classics can be published in book form. I vote against them in the magazines.

I realize that the science fiction fan is highly critical creature. Can you imagine, for instance, a reader writing in to the Ladies' Whoosis Magazine and proceeding to pull the thing to pieces from cover to cover? Yet that is exactly what we SF fans do; nothing escapes our eagle eye or fails to get kicked around. Yet I believe this is a good thing. A fan has to read your mag before he can write intelligently about it. And the critical attitude of the fans keep SF mags the best group on the stands.

I hope you print this letter. I'd like some of my friends to see it. They act as if I were a mental case; they say "He reads science fiction!" in the same tone they'd say "He eats worms!" One woman asked me if I didn't think reading such stuff would do me harm. Personally, I believe that reading science fiction has done more to broaden my viewpoint than anything else I ever did.

"Once in a Blue Moon" is the best story in the issue. I read it eagerly and my interest didn't flag once. I am partial to stories that take me out of this solar system. "The Air Whal" is my candidate for second place. Nice. Struck me just right. "Rain of Fire"—some of the fans don't seem to like Cummings, but he can still spin a likely tale. "Washington Slept Here"—stuck in my mind longer than any other story in the issue. "Ajax of Ajas"—I particularly liked the Third Least Wu. "Case of the Vanishing Cellars" comes next. I don't, as a rule, like humor in science fiction, but this one was well done. "Time Exposure"—don't look now, but I'm just a trifle confused about this one. Like riding a merry-go-round. Nice trip, but when you get off you're right where you started. We started for Alpha Centauri at the beginning of the story, but when we reach the end we are getting ready to go to—guess where? That's right, Alpha Centauri. I liked the story, incidentally. "Twilight of Tomorrow" was not quite as good as "The Man Who Knew Roger Stanley" but a powerful story nonetheless. "The Slim People" was clever. And "The Peacemakers" had a good surprise ending. Snuck up on me with it.

A pretty swell issue this time. I can give you 100% for one thing. It is obvious that you are in there trying to improve the magazine. As long as you do that, I am with you.

THIS issue of "Are Science Fiction Readers Mental Cases?" is one that has been coming up at least as long as SF magazines have been published. The various editors usually have replied to the effect that science fiction necessarily appeals to a person of higher intelligence than the average pulp-reader and it's the opposition to this form of reading that's crazy. No doubt, this sort of reply has made any number of fans and SF readers feel better.

But it's time to re-examine the case. Years ago, when this assertion was first made, it was not entirely unjustified. The usual science-fiction story was not essentially a pulp tale. Action, plot, and characterization, except for the works of a few authors who were really authors, were subordinated

to idea. And even in the "classics," the story was wreathed with masses of technical and theoretical material—such as would have the most appeal to a person who had a fairly comprehensive idea of the fundamentals of the various sciences. Certainly it had little appeal to the reader who was just out for a story and nothing more. If you skipped the science and theory, there wasn't much left, as a rule—so it can be said that science-fiction, at that time, was over the heads of the general run of pulp readers.

That did not necessarily make these general readers morons or make the devotees of science-fiction incipient supermen. It just implied that the enjoyment of this field of reading required a particular degree of formal education as well as an imaginative bent of mind. The ability to absorb and retain the mass of facts which go to make up the commonly known "liberal education" does not in itself imply a super-normal intelligence—nor does the fact that any given individual, for one reason or another, has not absorbed this mass of information necessarily imply subnormal intelligence. The science of education is still in its infancy and the application thereof is, as a rule, somewhat behind actual discoveries and substantiated theory in the field.

BUT the science-fiction of today is of a different genre. Primarily (there are exceptions, but they are in a minority) this type of fiction is written for the general run of pulp reader—that is, the story is the thing. In the better magazines in this field, you'll find ideas relating to scientific possibilities—and the development of these ideas in one concrete form or another. But it's quite a different thing: one does not need formal scientific education, even of the elementary kind, to enjoy science-fiction magazines these days. All that is now required is imagination and an ability to read.

In the old days, one not only had to be able to read words, sentences, and paragraphs to "get" a science-fiction tale, but one also had to have the ability to comprehend what they were reading, to interpret and know what the author was saying—otherwise, it was so much gibberish. Today, that isn't necessary—one can merely indulge in what is known as "passive reading," requiring no more concentration than is required to scan newspapers.

THUS we have imagination as a requisite—which in itself is not an indication of superior intelligence, although its absence might indicate subnormal intelligence. But it is a particular type of imagination upon which the science-fiction tale plays. Again, not necessarily a "superior" type; again, the person who lacks it is not ipso facto a moron.

The ideal science-fiction story today is that tale so written as to afford entertainment to the passive reader, but to contain solid meat within the framework of the story, and the ideas upon which the story is based, from which the active reader—he who not only reads words, but strives to ascertain what they mean, to discover what the writer of the words is trying to put over—can derive food for speculation. It is by no means easy to write this type of story, for which reason you'll find more of the strictly passive entertainment-type of fiction on the science-fiction Rialto.

We'd like to hear comments from readers, agreeing or disagreeing upon the above opinions.



Other insect machines were rising in swarms from the forest-covered city.

An herbivorous civilization would naturally look upon any degree of flesh-eating with horror—as the Earthmen found to their sorrow!

Illustration by John R. Forte, Jr.

FOR three days now the beautiful blue-white Altair had been growing in the forward vision screen. Streamers of blue fire had reached out to grasp the tiny ship, creeping across the face of the cosmos now at somewhat less than the speed of light.

The three men in the control room watched with varied feelings. To Herb Smithson it was refuge. To Mark Richards it was adventure. To Dan Daniewicz it was discovery.

The pilot, Richards, swiveled his chair around to face the other two.

"Sixteen light years from Mars," he announced. "That far enough for you, Herb?"

"It'll have to do," said Smithson, the small, wiry man with the ascetic face.

Daniewicz, the scientist, was at the telescope.

"Planets!" he breathed. "Five of them at least. Another boost for Laplace. Centauri, Tau Ceti, Procyon, Sirius, and now—Altair."

Mark Richards grunted his satisfaction and searched for the planets in his pilot tubes. Planets to him were not just another link in the chain of discovery. They meant adventure. He was beginning to be glad that Herb Smithson had got himself in hot water in the unstable Martian politics, because that was how this trip had begun. With the sinister Martian Gestapo after him, the only safe place for Herb was an unexplored planetary system. Certain improvements in the dimensional-geodetic drive of Mark's private space yacht by Daniewicz, the third member of the inseparable trio, had enabled them to get the jump on the Gestapo.

It had been tough. The Gestapo had personal tracers good for 2,000,000 miles on everyone who was in politics, so that when one was out he was easy to remove. How Herb had got as far as Phobos, where they had picked him up, Mark Richards could never figure. They had circled the

sun to break the tracer connection, then set a bee-line course for Altair.

There were other ships in the System capable of reaching Altair, or even Fomalhaut, but in the three years of super-fast geodetic drives the sphere of exploration hadn't advanced that far.

EN NUMBER four looks good," said Daniewicz absently. "The others are either too big or too hot. Wup—there's another small, cold one—"

But Mark Richards had already trained the pilot tubes on the fourth planet.

The world was green and blue and hazy. It rotated on an axis and it had a heavy atmosphere. It was smaller than the Earth and slightly hotter. That much Daniewicz had time to find out before the impatient Mark sent the ship streaking at reckless speed into the mysterious, veiled face of the globe. The scream of tortured air outside was the first welcome increment to the crackling of the engines the three had heard for four months.

"Take it easy," snapped Daniewicz. "We're pretty far from home to go bumping into a mountain."

The pilot said nothing. In another moment he had the ship under the moist, white clouds, and hovering over a landscape that was blindingly green, a riot of color after long exposure to the black infinity of space.

Far to the right was a vast ocean, orange-tinted, billowing gently under the continuous blanket of clouds. Where the ocean ended the green began, stretching to all the other horizons.

"My God, what luck!" screamed Daniewicz. "It's a replica of Earth or Venus. And the air! 27% oxygen, 1.5% carbon dioxide, the rest inert—"

Mark Richards was inching the controls forward gently, eyes fast on the forward and lower vision screens.

"Look. Look," he said tensely and pointed.

In the forest below was a city of sorts. A vast arboreal city of low domes and lush vegetation, geometrically arranged. It was hard to see where the city began and the forest ended. Regularly spaced were great squares of satin-black, with buildings skirting their edges, standing out in the green.

"Sun-power plants," whistled Daniewicz. "I wonder what else they have?"

As if to answer the question, three insect-like things rose from the vicinity of the nearest power plant and moved swiftly toward the ship. Their delicate wings blurred in motion almost too swift to see, but their bodies were solid and metallic. They weren't insects, for inside them were—men. Small, sharp-eyed men with high foreheads and delicate mouths. Little naked men, whose skins looked like orange peel, and who peered, owlishly at the huge silver ship that had suddenly appeared in their skies.

Other insect machines were rising in swarms from the forest-covered city.

Mark Richards moved a lever gently, and slowly the big ship moved past the frail-looking machines and dipped toward the city. Beside one of the black squares, where the vegetation was less dense, he set the ship down carefully, giving time for the staring, piping, scurrying creatures to clear a space.

The strange trees towered fully a hundred feet on all sides, and the domes among them were not as small as they had looked from above. They were made of some white building material and had windows with no glass. The trees had enormous leathery leaves, spreading like giant elms over the roof of the city, leaving the buildings and the busy, matted walks in semi-darkness.

"You said the air was safe?" asked Mark Richards.

"As your own back yard," said the scientist. "But I won't vouch for the reception committee."

Mark caused both doors of the massive lock to slide swiftly into their recesses. Warm, sweet forest-scented air rushed in to equalize the pressures.

Outside was a solid phalanx of little men, looking very humanly frightened but holding their ground. They were lined three-deep, holding thin tubes of wood in

tiny, four-fingered hands. Slowly Mark Richards took his hand from the butt of his bullet projector and laughed.

"They're vertebrates," Daniewicz was saying excitedly. "Humanoids, like the Sirians, but notice the salient differences? The shape of the head—the jaw—the teeth—"

Herb Smithson spoke softly out of the corner of his mouth.

"Look—the king, or chief, or whatever he is."

Behind the phalanx of tube-holders was a little man with the top of his hairless skull painted a brilliant white. Beside him stood two other painted-skulls, one green and one red. They radiated authority.

The phalanx opened and the man with the white skull came forward.

Herb Smithson bowed in the reverent manner taught him by the feudalism of Mars, touching his forehead with his hand. White-skull surveyed him for a moment, then turned and gave a command in a piping voice.

THROUGH the phalanx of tube-holders came the man with the green skull, leading a procession laden with large wooden discs bearing varicolored fruits, berries, and unrecognizable substances.

"We're being invited to supper by the Minister of Food himself," whispered Herb Smithson. "Better accept."

"What say we pitch in and make it Dutch treat?" Mark Richards said. "It seems to be their idea of a friendly gesture."

"Good idea," said Herb. "I'll see if I can make them understand."

He bowed again and gestured toward the interior of the ship. The little men with the painted heads followed him easily, trustingly, as he led the way to the ship's dining salon. The procession of food carriers came after, gazing at the spacious, luxuriously decorated room in awe, placing their wooden platters on the stainless metal tables.

"This is a big thing to them," said Herb out of the corner of his mouth. "Like smoking the peace-pipe. We'd better make the most of it."

He faced White-skull and bowed again. "Won't you join us in a bit of snack?" he said in his best English accent, making eating motions.

White-skull and his two ministers caught the idea, but they wanted to sit on the floor. Herb helped them into comfortable chairs while Mark pushed menu buttons. Herb was grinning happily. This solemn farce was a masterpiece of diplomacy with an alien race—that important first impression that would shape the course of history.

The robot waiters came trundling in on their tracks, laden with delicate dishes of steaming coffee, potatoes, Venusian chinch-roots, asparagus, a beautifully browned beef roast, and various desserts.

Man's food, thought Mark Richards, and noted that Daniewicz was running some of the offered fruits through the food analyzer. The machine detected traces of poisons in the alien foods, harmless to these creatures but possibly deadly to Earthmen. Mark noted with satisfaction that only two varieties proved bad.

Thus the feast began.

White-skull was obviously pleased at engineering what to him was a treaty of eternal friendship with these powerful strangers who rode down from the sky. Red-skull and Daniewicz were engaged in heated sign language over one of the robot waiters. Green-skull, whom Herb had dubbed the Minister of Food, was examining the foods with interest. He nibbled off a bit of the delicious Venusian chinch-root and nodded approvingly. He came to the asparagus and made a wry face. Mark Richards showed him how to cut the roast. Green-skull examined it very carefully, rubbing off some of the brown scale with a nailless finger.

Mark made a gesture of placing a big slice of meat on Herb Smithson's plate, and grinned at the other's repelling gesture. Herb was a sworn vegetarian, contending that meat-eating was a barbarous habit on its way out.

"They named you right, Herb," Mark said. "Why don't you break down and admit you crave man's food?"

Herb was about to retort, when suddenly Green-skull was on his feet, piping shrilly. His face was convulsed in horror. Too stricken to speak, he pointed a shaking finger at the roast.

White-skull froze in the act of biting a slice of meat with his small, delicate teeth. His eyes dilated; his skin turned several shades of blue and purple. Then he leaped to his feet, piping orders.

Mark looked up in alarm. He suddenly

realized that the phalanx outside had dissolved and that the tube-holders were crowding into the ship.

"Dan—Herb—look out!" he yelled, dragging at his bullet projector.

White-skull was yelling, pointing, hopping. Tubes were leveled. There was a series of sharp popping noises, and green mist swirled forth. Mark Richards knew what it meant and held his breath.

He sent a stream of bullets into the midst of the orange men, fighting his way toward the door. Light, frail, yet surprisingly strong bodies surged against him. A bullet, ricochetting from a steel wall, struck him in the shoulder. He clubbed his gun and fought forward.

Then tortured lungs sought air and found green gas. Mark's stomach swam in sudden nausea. He was down on one knee. Another tube popped in his face and he fell forward, cursing.

"The damn treacherous little devils," he muttered, as his mind skittered into the blackness.

THE green vapor of the gas tubes was not the perfect anaesthetic, Mark Richards concluded as he lay on a smooth floor and tried to bring some stability back to his retching stomach.

"What happened?" he asked without opening his eyes.

"We pulled a boner," said Herb's voice.

Mark opened his eyes. Herb was propped up on an elbow, lying on a leathery, six-foot leaf that had been spread on the floor. Daniewicz, on another leaf, was still out cold.

"Obviously," snarled Mark Richards. "We should have given those pink devils a taste of the ray cannon instead of the eats."

"Don't blame them," Herb said. "To them, you are an unspeakable monstrosity, a thing to be stamped out."

"But we aren't so different, and at first they—"

"Don't you see? They're a vegetarian race. An herbivorous civilization. Naively they assumed that any civilized being must be the same—the carnivores of this planet apparently aren't the nicest sort. Green-skull caught on to what the roast was just in time. These people are somewhat telepathic, I guess—he caught some of the revolting lust for meat from your mind, or he wouldn't have dared imagine such an awful thing."

"Well—I'm—damned," stammered Mark Richards.

Herb grinned down at him. This was triumph for him, of a sort.

"You're a cannibal to these people," he gloated. "A hideous thing. You may be Mark Richards, millionaire, back in the System, but your stock here isn't worth a nickel. They'll probably boil you in vegetable oil."

"Oww! Quit talking about food and eating!" This from Daniewicz, who was rolling about on the floor.

Mark Richards climbed painfully to his feet and looked around. The bullet projector was gone from his belt, as were his wrist watch, pocket radio, and gravity booster. Everything resembling mechanism had been stripped from him, leaving only the light, loose Venusian silk of his garments, cool against his sweating body. A glance at the others told him that they had been similarly stripped.

"You mean," said Mark Richards deliberately, "that all they have against us is our eating?"

Herb nodded.

"You could be a ten-legged, bug-eyed monster and they'd mind it less," he said. "White-skull here saw me refuse the meat. He's almost ready to forgive me for being with you."

Mark looked up, and there, peering down from a hole in the ceiling, was White-skull. The little man cringed away as Mark shook his fist.

The room—or pit—was hexagonal and had no doors. The floor and walls were made of white, fibrous material, hard to the touch. The ceiling, twenty feet above, was a heavy metal screen through which Mark could see crowded faces peering down at them. Naked, orange, frightened looking creatures of both sexes, gaping down at the three Earthmen in owlish horror.

"We're in a zoo," said Herb. "In a particularly strong pen labeled 'carnivorous' or 'man-eating' or something."

Mark tried to visualize the alien psychology that made a meat-eater so unspeakably repulsive to these creatures. It was easier when he remembered what he himself had thought of the civilized cannibals of Tau Ceti, who played around with atomic explosives and ate their own dead. To these men of Altair he was as bad, probably worse.

He could sympathize with them—but he

was mad. He wanted to fight. He intended to fight, given the chance.

WHITE-SKULL is back," said Herb in a low voice.

The curious creature with his shining symbol of authority was back at the opening in the bars again. So were several tube-holders. Seeing those wooden tubes, Mark was suddenly sick again.

A knotted rope came snaking down. Mark stepped forward, but the wooden tubes waved him away menacingly.

"Wheep!" squeaked White-skull, pointing a finger at Herb.

The wiry, Mars-tanned Smithson lost no time in climbing up the rope, ignoring the gas tubes which followed his every move.

"See if you can smuggle me a blaster," called Mark Richards after him.

"Nothing doing," said Herb over his shoulder. "The day isn't past for diplomacy."

Mark cursed him as he disappeared over the edge of the pit, into the midst of the menacing tubes.

Time wore slowly with nothing more than the staring faces for excitement. Mark Richards examined every square inch of the walls, and nowhere was there so much as a crack between bricks or a soft spot to dig at. He tried leaping as high as he could in the lowered gravity, and the top of the wall was just ten feet above his reaching fingers.

"Now's the time to use that brain of yours, Dan," said Mark. "How are we going to get our hands on a couple of blasters?"

"Let Herb talk them into giving us a reprieve," said Daniewicz, rolling over and going to sleep.

Mark Richards sat on his leaf for a long time, staring at the wall. The effects of the green gas were wearing off; he was hungry again. But apparently none of the orange creatures had thought of feeding the captives. Mark had an insane vision of little boys throwing peanuts at a monkey cage. Then he fell asleep in the drowsy humidity.

The next thing he knew was Herb's voice, calling from above.

"Hey, wild ones, are you still alive?"

Mark yawned, and looked up to see Herb and the red-skinned one peering down at them. Tube-wielders were much in evidence in the background.

"Hungry?" asked Herb, dumping a basket of strange fruits into the pit.

"Quit grinning, you Martian ape, and tell us the news," snarled Mark, falling on the fruit with gusto.

"Well," began Herb, "it's a long story, but I've finally convinced these fellows that I don't eat meat at all—that I'm a superior type of being to you fellows. That you were my lowly servants, my domestic animals, so to speak."

"Well, then, toss us the rope and let's get out of here," said Mark.

"Not so fast," hissed Herb. "At the first false move they'd feed me the gas and toss me back in there."

"How are you getting along with the diplomacy?" asked Daniewicz.

"Fine," replied Herb. "I'm smaller than you fellows, built more like these people in the first place. And the old birds saw me refuse the meat. That goes a long way with them, since they're basically friendly and harmless anyway. So they're teaching me the language. It's a lot easier than Martian was in college. See," he piped a few syllables in falsetto at Red-skull, who piped back and scowled at the two in the pit.

Mark wondered what he had said.

"All right," Mark said. "Now how about the blasters? Don't tell me you didn't sneak a few under your coat!"

"No," said Herb. "I think I'll let you suffer for your sins a while longer. These people have a peaceful civilization up here—wonderful social system and plenty of science. Those flying machines we saw were just an example. They have the sun-power plants with very fancy accumulators, an underground rapid transit system, radio, and a few things we haven't dreamed of. Few weapons, though—they aren't a war-like race, and evidently they eliminated all the malicious carnivores from their planet a long time ago. They live at peace with and on the forest, with only a few internal frictions that necessitate some authority and the guards."

RED-SKULL was saying something, grabbing at Herb's arm.

"Red-skull is Minister of Science," Herb explained. "He's been nosing around the ship, trying to make out how it works. I made him understand that one of you cannibals was more versed in such mundane,

commonplace things than I, and he wants me to ask you." He grinned. "How does it work?"

"The ordinary space propulsion is a neutron drive," said Daniewicz. "High-speed mass with neutral charge, propelled by atomics to make a reaction motor. The geodetic drive, on the other hand—"

"Oh, shut up!" yelled Mark Richards. "Tell Red-skull we'll show him how it works if and when he gets us out of here."

Herb shook his head.

"He wouldn't get near you cannibals with a rubber suit. In fact, with two rubber suits. You're loathsome. I've always told you so."

By the time Mark had stopped cursing, Herb and his escort had disappeared.

"The ungrateful amoeba!" fumed Richards. "The slime-covered son-of-a-Martian! We pull him out of the teeth of the Gestapo and this is the thanks we get! Give me a blaster and I'll—"

"Don't eat that one," said Daniewicz, snatching a fruit out of his hand. "That's a poisonous variety—same poison as toadstools. Very bad."

Days went by before Herb visited them again. Days of monotonous, maddening waiting in the pit.

There were periods of light and darkness. To Mark they seemed eternities, but Daniewicz insisted that they were approximately two hours shorter than earthly days and nights.

Four times a day they were thrown fruits, roots, and various prepared substances, but the two Earthmen confined their eating to varieties which had been proven non-poisonous. With each batch of fruit came fresh leaves—"bedding," Mark called them.

Once a day water squirted with stinging force from holes near the top of the wall, thoroughly rinsing the pit and its occupants, draining through small holes at the edges of the floor. The Earthmen didn't mind the showers—they were welcome—but the crudeness, the helplessness of their position was mind-destroying. Most of the time Mark paced the floor, heaping vilifications on the Martian Gestapo, the Altairians, and a certain little unmentionable whose name had once been Herb Smithson. Daniewicz sat placidly on the floor, working out some idle theories, performing integrations in his head.

Then Herb came again, with Red-skull and a new army of tube-wielders.

"Dan," he said, "Red-skull has promised to let you out to show him some of the ship's equipment. Don't try anything."

"I'll show him," yelled Mark, reaching for the rope which had been lowered.

He was halfway up it when the gas tubes popped. He slipped to the floor in sudden nausea, holding his breath. Above, tubes bristled around Red-skull's worried face.

"Not you, Mark," said Herb. "Red-skull doesn't trust you."

Grinning at the fuming Mark, Daniewicz climed the rope and vanished into the swarm of tube-wielders.

A HALF-HOUR later they lowered his unconscious form into the pit. He was very pale and reeked of the green gas.

"He tried to start the ship," Herb said sadly from above. "I advised him not to, but he tried."

Mark Richards stretched the unconscious man on a fresh leaf and said nothing. He was thinking of what he would do to the little ape if he ever got out of the pit. The Martian Gestapo would have to look long and far to find the pieces.

More days and nights went by. The Earthmen took to wrestling during the light periods to keep in trim, though the heavy, bull-necked Richards always pinned the long, lanky Daniewicz. The spectators above crowded to watch the antics of these bestial creatures.

Herb had started bringing them baskets of fruit, and each time his escort of tube-holders was smaller. From the looks of things, Herb was becoming quite a statesman up above. His gift of gab and political training were standing him in good stead.

One day he appeared with head shaven and skull painted a vivid purple.

"Meet Purple-skull, the new Minister of Politics," grinned Herb proudly. "Some of my ideas went over better here than they did on Mars, and White-skull put me in office. He appoints his own ministers, you know, even though he's elected by the Growers—"

"If your mother could only see you now," said Mark Richards maliciously.

And still Herb did nothing to get them out of the pit.

"It's too big a gulf to span," moaned

Daniewicz. "They never will trust us meat-eaters enough to let us get to our ship and get off this damned planet."

That night Mark Richards started scratching at an inconspicuous spot on one of the walls with his belt buckle.

He had penetrated to a depth of three centimeters on successive nights, when the sudden popping of gas tubes sent them both into the land of nod. They were minus belt buckles when they awoke, very sick men.

The next day Herb lowered them a basket of fruit and two fresh leaves. At the bottom of the basket was a coil of thin, tough Venusian spider rope, a small paralyzer, and a note. Mark hid the gun and the rope under his leaf for the moment and read the note as soon as there were no staring faces at the rim of the pit.

"Managed to sneak these out of ship," said Herb's neat, cramped hand. "Has been absolutely impossible to do anything until now. I told you these people are telepathic and I've had to be good. Ship is outside at nearest power station—1½ km. Best time to try, just before sunrise. Guards at door for your benefit. Don't try to take the tubeway—walk! Luck. Herb."

GOOD old runt," said Mark Richards softly. "I knew he wasn't just a sniveling statesman, deep down. But the damn fool could have got me a blaster!"

He fingered the paralyzer under the leaf. It wasn't worth much as a weapon, but perhaps better than nothing. It would knock out an Earthman at two meters.

That night, when Daniewicz told him dawn was near, Mark uncoiled the rope. He looked up at the grille. How to get it hooked? An idea occurred to him; he tied one end of the rope to the paralyzer's grip, hefted it, and tossed carefully. The little gun spun up through the bars, snaking the rope up and over as it came tumbling down again. Mark wiggled the rope until the gun was in his hand, as well as both ends of the rope. He had made no noise.

With the agility of a cat he went up the rope hand over hand, and through the hole in the metal grille. Daniewicz wasn't far behind. Mark paused to retrieve the rope and stuff it in his pocket.

They were on the main floor of one of the domes. The raised metal grilles of

other pits stood out in straight rows, and low, restless noises filled the room.

Mark squeezed Dan's arm and pointed mutely.

Outlined in grey semi-darkness was an arched doorway, and silhouetted against the light were two guards. They were armed with gas tubes and they were awake, piping softly.

Mark held his paralyzer in readiness and advanced silently. The guards had heard nothing unusual. Mark was still three meters from them when one of them turned suddenly. He had forgotten about their strange telepathic sense.

The tube-wielders weren't men of action. They were slow. They could barely swing their tubes to bear before Mark had stepped within paralyzer range. He pressed the trigger. The weapon vibrated—it was super-sonic—but the tube-wielders did not drop. Instead, their gas tubes popped and Mark cursed under his breath as he ducked under the green vapor. He bore ahead with the paralyzer and finally the nearer guard dropped. Mark was on the other in an instant, fist thudding. The little naked orange man went down without a sound, and Mark surveyed his big fist with a ludicrous sense of shame.

Then he was through the door, ducking past the remnants of the gas. Dan was not far behind, reeling, looking very sick.

"As—I—thought," he gasped past tight lips. "Nervous system—these men—less centralized. That's why the paralyzer—"

Mark yanked him behind the foliage that bordered the street.

There had been some sound. Mark cursed the inefficiency of the paralyzer, forgetting that a blaster would have made enough noise to raise the dead.

Apparently the noises had awakened no one, however. The dark, silent street was devoid of movement.

The street was easily fifteen meters wide, paved only with matted, packed leaves of huge size. Far above, greyish sky peered raggedly past mighty foliage as an unseen wind rustled the treetops. The trunks of the trees, so evenly spaced between the domes, were fully ten meters across at the base, covered with pitch-black bark that made them hard to see in the darkness. Spidery white cables stretched between the trees, sometimes descending to the ground. The street was bordered on both sides by

wide strips of lush vegetation, small trees and shrubs with brilliant fruits and flowers.

"See that patch of sky ahead—the big one?" Mark Richards whispered, pointing. "That must be the power station. Remember, it was clear of trees. The ship is there if that little ape wasn't kidding us."

"One of the guards is waking up," Daniewicz pointed out. "I told you the paralyzer—"

Mark gave each of the guards a double dose of the super-sonic vibrations at the base of the skull. To an Earthman, that was sometimes fatal.

Then they started down the street, the matted leaves muffling their footsteps. Still not a being stirred, not a thing moved save the foliage. It was too easy. Mark knew it couldn't last that way; it never stayed quiet long when his scalp twitched the way it was doing.

They came past a hooded opening in the middle of the street, disclosing a steep ramp that led down into the ground.

"An underground transit system," whispered Daniewicz. "These people seem to have no surface vehicles at all. Good idea, but I wonder—"

Mark pulled him away. Stay out of the tubeway, Herb had said. Mark had been in the pit too long to disregard a warning given in good faith.

THE big patch of sky ahead was near now, only a few hundred meters away. Already Mark could see the closely-grouped domes of the power station, but the ship was still out of sight. They had been walking swiftly about ten minutes and nothing had happened. The sky was lighter, much lighter.

Then there were noises. Sounds from the power station and a commotion back in the direction from which they had come.

"This is it," said Mark Richards. "Run!"

An orange man came running out of one of the domes. The creature's eyes opened wide, glowing palely in the semi-darkness, and it squealed before Daniewicz trampled it down. Mark paused to give it a dose of the paralyzer.

But the alarm was out. Other noises filled the night. Leaping forms were converging on them. Orange men came hopping from the domes; they came sliding down the

cables in large, glittering machines that moved silently.

"These are civilians," said Mark optimistically. "No gas tubes."

A gas tube popped from the bushes, full in his face. Mark started to lift his paralyzer, then swore and threw the useless weapon at the cringing creature. He was sick—weak. His stomach retched. Daniewicz was dragging him on, until the effects of the whiff of gas started to pass. Devilish stuff—Mark would rather have fought bullets.

Part of the mob was moving toward them, some away. That gave them an extra few seconds to run, but the power station was still distant and the ship out of sight.

"Here," snapped Mark, stooping into one of the tubeway entrances.

The ramp led down into a white-walled tunnel, lighted by globes of green fluorescence. A landing platform, a bank of controls, and a gleaming monorail completed the typical tubeway station.

A sharp humming filled the tunnel. A gleaming bullet-shaped car shot out along the rail and screamed to a halt. Mark groaned as a full phalanx of tube-wielders piled out with military efficiency.

Herb had been right—better to stay in the open. They were running up the ramp again, into the face of a milling crowd of orange men. Tubes popped, and some of the orange men dropped. The tube-wielders were immune to their own gas, but not so the civilians.

The heavy Mark plowed a way for Daniewicz through the crowd, fists busy. The thought of that phalanx behind, shooting foul-smelling gases at his head, gave him the power of ten men.

"Take to the air," yelled Mark, grabbing one of the descending ropes of the network above.

Up they went, hand over hand, over the faces of the milling mob. Climbing was easy in the low gravity, but the orange men, too, were expert climbers. Mark looked back and saw the horde of tube-wielders from the ground seeping up the rope like oil in a wick.

Mark's hand found the first cross-cable thirty meters above the street. He started along it. His arms were becoming laden, sluggish, as he counted along, one-two, one-two.... This was the finish, thought Mark Richards.

A NEW sound came to his ears. At first he thought it was another tubecar, but the sound grew in volume. A low, throbbing hum that seeped through the mighty forest but was not of it, that came from beyond—above—

Mark's hands froze on the rope. The climbing tube-wielders were still. The crowd below became a frozen sea of staring faces, moveless, hushed. The sound was familiar to Mark. Impossible, here, but familiar.

"Dan," he breathed, shifting his grip on the rope, dangling above the street, "what do you say?"

"A ship," said Daniewicz. "A sixteen-tube power cruiser, I'd say from the sound of it."

"Not mine," said Mark Richards.

The sound climbed into a muffled roar. Mark searched the leafy ceiling with his eyes and cursed the trees for obscuring the view. Another ship out here on Altair might mean a lot of things, but he was sure that it couldn't mean coincidence. In that case—

"Look!" yelled Daniewicz. "There!"

It hung framed in the rift above the power station, a great sleek silver thing, the purple lightning of ionization playing about its tubes. One—two—three—four—five. Mark counted the battle ports and whistled. This was a full-fledged battle cruiser. He did not need to see the Martian coat of arms emblazoned across the port to know its mission.

"The Gestapo!" he swore viciously. "The dirty, sneaking Martian Gestapo. As if we didn't have enough."

But the coming of the ship had given them respite. The tube-wielders were making no move to attack, and the crowd below had forgotten the two fugitives on the rope.

"I told you circling the sun wasn't enough," said Daniewicz. "These new tracers are hard to break. They must have followed us long enough to get a line on our direction, put two and two together, and here they are."

"Poor little runt," lamented Mark. "Poor Purple-skull, whose only crime was to be a pacifist on Mars. If those dogs up there have a tracer on him they can dig him up like a worm."

"My mother told me never to monkey with Martian politics," agreed Daniewicz. "That's why I chose science."

The ship above was hovering now, not moving. Mark could almost see the Martians within. Cruel, efficient little men, closing in on the prey they had chased sixteen light years.

"Let me at my ship—" begged Mark.

"No good," said Daniewicz. "That cruiser carries three times your power. They could melt you in three seconds."

From one of the battle stations of the Martian ship came a pale purple beam of ionization. It vanished beyond the trees. Instantly the piercing scream of mighty discharges tore through the forest as blue light flashed eerily in the semi-dawn.

"The screen!" cried Daniewicz. "That's the interference screen!"

"The runt must have reached the ship," said Mark. "They're raying him!"

The purple beam grew in intensity, discharges playing in an agony of sound. Then it snapped off. The air wavered. Smoke gushed suddenly near the power station.

"They're trying to burn him off the ground," Mary observed grimly. "They know they've got him. They're taking it easy."

The invisible heat beam was sweeping back and forth across the forest. Flames crackled. The Martians were clearing a space, leisurely burning the city of the orange men while they prepared to blast the refuge of the unfortunate Earthman.

The orange men were fleeing now, rushing headlong away from the power station, down a street lighted with leaping flames. Mark winced as an invisible sword of heat cut across the street near them. The Martians were using a common heat beam, not the induction ray, which would have been useless against the forest.

"Down!" yelled Mark, pulling himself toward a descending strand, new strength in his arms.

Again a wave of heat, this time near. The network of ropes sagged but held. The tube-wielders were gone; the ropes were clear.

In a moment they were on the ground, racing past the leaping flames toward the power station. At last they saw the ship, bathed in a shower of crackling sparks.

"Good for Herb," said Mark fiercely. "Long as he stays grounded, that induction beam won't hurt him much. They're holding him down."

He felt helpless, bare-handed. If he could only get into the ship—

Darting forms darkened the sky. Mark saw them now, the insect-like flying machines of the orange men—many of them. They were attacking the Martian ship. They spun and hovered, but they were like a swarm of hornets without stings. Against the armored space ship they were useless as so many dust motes.

Two of the machines crashed headlong into the hovering destroyer and fell fluttering toward the ground, splintered wrecks.

"Poor beasts," muttered Mark. "They don't have much else besides spunk, and that can't dent armor."

SUDDENLY his eyes popped. The Martian ship was turning cherry red, heating to incandescence. Instantly a blinding mantle of blue fire formed around it as its screen went on, and it streaked upward. A vivid purple induction ray of tremendous power followed it up, up, almost out of sight.

Mark's amazed eyes sought the source of that beam and found it—in the power station.

"What the—come on!" he yelled, shoving Daniewicz toward their ship.

They ran through blistering heat that emanated from the smoking ground. The ship's hull was hot, too, but the sparks no longer flashed around it; the screen was off. They pushed toward the lock, shielding their faces from the radiant heat. The massive doors opened almost immediately. They were within the ship in an instant, running for the control room. Herb was there, grotesque with his purple skull and its quarter-inch growth of hair.

"Hi, fellows," he said weakly. "Come join the party."

Mark shoved him aside roughly and strapped himself in the control seat. Experienced hands pulled toggles; eyes glued themselves to pilot tubes. A light blinked rapidly, and suddenly acceleration turned the world on its side.

The Martian ship was high above, almost out of sight. But Mark kept his eyes on the power station, on the spot whence the mighty beam had come. That beam had exceeded in power anything his ship had, and anything the Martians had. It could destroy Mark's ship in a second.

But the ray did not swing in their direction. With a sigh of relief Mark turned his attention to the Martian ship.

(Continued On Page 98)



FANATICS OF MERCURY

Commander Montross had an ingenious plan to arouse the flagging public interest in his epic interplanetary novels!

By Henry Andrew Ackermann

Illustration by Hilkert

HERE were books in the windows of Surinam and Slidell, certainly, but their number barely totaled a scant five and even these were buried beneath spacesuits, European Ebonard skins, a scattering of meteorites and similar curios of star voyaging. In a frame at the center of this display, as it were enshrined by it, stood a photograph of a gentleman wearing a spacesuit, holding the helmet of it in the crook of his right arm. He boasted a wisp of a mustache of the sort which enable movie fans who have missed the beginning of a film to pick the hero of it even while tripping over other people's feet. Beneath this picture was a placard stating that Commander Monte Maurice Montross, planet explorer, adventurer and author, would meet his admirers and autograph his books from one o'clock until four o'clock as advertised in the papers and announced over the radio.

There followed a list of the dashing commander's works... "Lunatics of Luna," "Horrors of Kobar Cunn," "Hellions of Ganymede," and several similar titles which echoed the screams of the dying in the trackless wastes of space.

Toward the rear of Surinam and Slidell's, in the interplanetary travel department, the commander, himself,

sat behind a spacious desk. And at intervals throughout the afternoon he was waited upon by round-shouldered office workers, spinsters from the suburbs and other easy-chair-thrill hunters who craved the boon of his signature and to whom meeting their hero in the flesh would remain the greatest adventure in their humdrum lives.

The intervals, however, were altogether too long and this was why four o'clock found Commander Montross' habitual devil-may-care attitude giving way to the troubled preoccupation of a businessman who sees trade turning slack. His publishers, Hackny and Stycle who issued the exciting "Interplanetary Series," had hinted that he was slipping. The advance sales of his new book bore them out.

The comments of the science-literature critics ("Peat and Repeat".... "Ineffective".... "Montross' book is just another fiction folly.") added insult to injury. And now, even the autograph hunters were deserting him! Commander Montross, who was neither so young nor so square-jawed as his photograph suggested, scowled across the aisle at a fat lady who was purchasing the works of Senor Manana.

"I'll show them! You bet I'll do

it! My next book....it'll be about something new, something startling," he promised himself grimly. "Refreshing slant....that's it! I'm, let me see, now; how about the lost race of Martians which, in the dread caves of Pluto....But no, no, that's been done before. Space war? Well, special warfare isn't exactly new, but it's still good. First, though, I'd have to have the various news agencies flash a story I'll work up about mysterious occurrences in space. But....the heels!....don't fall for my stuff the way they used to. They're leery of me lately! No, I'm afraid space war won't do after all. A superman? Fooey, it's been worked to death! Well, everything has! This blasted interplanetary field is overcrowded, that's the whole trouble! There's nothing left to do and write about that a flock of other professional author-heroes haven't done and written about already. I've just got to think up a different kind of stunt, but what the hell will it be?"

"**C**OMMANDER!" a shocked but deferential voice broke in upon his meditations. "While I don't know if it's annoying for a man of your experience to sit in a shop and sign books all day, it's hardly polite of you to use bad language to a young fellow who looks up to you as I do!"

"What? Oh, I'm frightfully sorry, my boy!" the commander was on his feet, hand extended and smiling his best close-up smile. "I....ha! ha!....I fancy I was thinking aloud! Sit down, have a smoke and....say, what's this you're wearing on your hand? Why, it looks like a ring, an ancient Venusian circlet of royalty!"

"Why perhaps it does," said the youth, hastily removing the object

and dropping it into his pocket. "But it's really only brass knucks. When all of a sudden you started cursing, I...."

"Forgive me, please!" Commander Montross shoved across a cigarette lighter and sat back to study his young admirer. He saw a stocky, bullet-headed lout of perhaps twenty-two, with thick shoulders, sandy hair and eyes of gray. His face, for all its present awed expression, was of a surly, pugnacious cast. Commander Montross sized him up as an adventure-struck laborer, incapable of brain-work and embittered with the world accordingly.

"Yes, Commander, sir," he was saying, and it was plain that he had carefully rehearsed his speech, "to a young man who leads a shut-in life like mine, your stories are a God-send. There's been many a time when reading one of your perilous adventures has saved me from going mad with the sheer drudgery of my shut-in existence. Thanks to your vivid writings, I've come to know far lands which I shall never really see and....and—well, sir, I want to thank you."

"Oh, don't mention it!" protested Commander Montross, his soul a-wallow in the praise like a hog in a mud puddle. "I'm only too happy to hear that I've brought you an occasional ray of interplanetary sunlight, a breath from the void so to speak. Ah ha, I see you have some books for me to autograph. Just pass them over, Mister....er...."

"Teagarden is the name, Commander....Jack Teagarden."

Commander Montross opened one of the volumes at the flyleaf and poised his pen. "But what's this?" he inquired, indicating a printed label pasted onto the cover. "Property of

the spacemen's mission lending library, Mardopolis, Jupiter.' You must have got it secondhand, eh?"

"Yes, that's about the size of it," admitted the lout, blushing firely.

"But this one is stamped 'Stewart's Terra Firma Library and Luncheonette, Propantis, Mars.' And this one here....why, my word, it says 'Reading Room of the Psang-Pano Club, Psang-Pano, Neptune!'"

"Does it?" The bullet-headed lout leaned over and examined the book in confusion. "Why so it does! Now I recall the circumstances! You see, sir, the very day after I borrowed it, there was a terrible electrical-vortex storm, or a landslide or something like that. I forgot the details now....and though I spared no effort to return it, I...."

"Do you mean to say you actually were out there?" demanded the commander, incredulously. "Confound it all, boy, that planet is the wildest spot left in the entire Solar System and yet you've just finished telling me about your sedentary, shut-in life! Are you trying to be funny or what?"

"H, NOT in the least, sir!" protested the other in deadly earnest. "When I said shut-in, I mean *shut-in*, for I've been shut in a ship's galley for years. Damn it all, sir! Don't get the idea that a cook's travels are in a class with Maxwell's, Senor Manana's or your own, Commander. All my time in space I'm being nagged by a scurvy lot of sailordogs who want a good meal. And all I know of a hundred planetary ports are the docks and the spacemen's quarters with their smelly odors."

"Yes, yes, I get the idea," nodded the explorer. "I have never thought

of a modern space sailor's life that way. But all the same, it's a strange coincidence that you happen to have been in Psang-Pano. You see....I was just thinking of....er...." He leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes and tapped the top of the desk with his fountain pen. "Of course, you didn't see much of the interior," he mused aloud. "I mean the Blue Men of Bal-le-Oran, the whistling vines, the echo flowers, and so on?"

"Aye, Commander, I saw some whistling vines!" the cook hopefully stated. "Twenty-four hours before we blasted off, two of them, creepin' and slitherin' they were, came very close to Psang-Pano. It was very strange; them things....they give me the shivers just to think of them....as a rule stay clear of the settlement."

Commander Montross jotted down a memorandum. "Good stuff! I'll make it a thousand of them; attacking the settlement," he murmured. "By the way, Jack....you don't mind me calling you 'Jack' do you?....just when were you in Psang-Pano?"

"The date is written in the book, sir....yes, it is, December 18th."

"Ten months ago, eh? Well, that's fine, that'd be just about right!" Commander Montross glanced over his shoulder, and then leaned over the desk, close to young Teagarden. "There's a possibility....just a bare one....that I may ask a special favor of you, Jack....Something in connection with my next expedition. There are some details to figure out first, but....where could I get in touch with you?"

"My ship, the *Solarium*," said the other eagerly, "is berthed in cradle 217, at the spaceyards until Friday. And, Commander, I'll be tickled pink

to help you in any way I can, for my personal debt to you is such that...."

"Really, you're too kind!" the explorer restrained him. "The favor I may ask will seem trifling to you, but you'll be rendering me a very great service indeed. Meanwhile...." he took a book from the table beside him.... "I hope you'll accept my latest story, 'Fanatics of Mercury.' It's abct my experiences on the hottest planet in the system. The critics have been kind enough to say it's.... ah....the best yarn I've ever written."

To the young cook's delight, he wrote on the flyleaf: Presented with my compliments to Mr. Jack Teagarden. Commander Monte Maurice Montross.

CHAPTER II

THE MECHANICS scurried around the short, stubby hull of the tramp freighter, *Solarium*, inspecting the blast tubes and the field was swarming with refueling tankers, ready to shoot their streams of energy into the sluggish craft that wallowed in cradle 217.

First mate, Gus Snow, made his way to the vessel's galley to check up on the supplies that were being stowed away for the coming voyage. He found second mate, McCann, daubing a swollen, black eye with a raw piece of steak and cursing to himself.

"Go ahead, look at it, sir!" McCann invited plaintively. "Not that I mean to belly-ache or that I'm standing on my rank or anything, but at the same time I'm his superior and...." ~ "Do you mean you've been bullying Jack again?" demanded Snow severely. "Slap my sassy face if I don't

think you're not equal to your job!"

McCann spread his big, beefy arms in helpless protest. "I merely asked him, politely at that, to cook those chickens that he forgot to cook yesterday. He retorted that he was going to stay aground till Friday and to hell with me anyway. Then he flew into a rage, called me a Fanatic, one thing led to another and then...."

"Then you led with your right and Jack countered with his left. Haw! Haw! I know....that eye!" Snow became unsympathetic. "Well, McCann, are you asking me to handle your subordinates for you, or what?"

"Not at all, sir," replied the second mate sullenly. "But I wish you'd forbid him to read any more of them dime spacers by that phoney, Montross. They've made Teagarden hate and loathe his job worser than a cat hates water. He's been slackin' down on his work for weeks, but since Montross signed those books for him, he's been in a sort of cataleptic trance. All he thinks about is Fanatics and bouncing spores and such. Speaking for myself, sir, I'm just about fed up with it!"

"Banana oil, McCann!" Snow chided him. "I haven't read the stories myself, but it's ridiculous to think that harmless travel books would affect a stout fellow like Jack. Why, I'm sure they're mere slop written to entertain the young. But still, if it would make you feel better, why don't you hook the things while he's aground and incinerate them?"

McCann's face brightened. "That's an idea!" he enthused. "Only...." he gingerly touched his black eye.... "only, I won't burn 'em....not me! Instead, if I have your permission, sir. I'll give them to you to do with as you see fit. Then, when he starts

looking for them and raises a rumpus, I can truthfully tell him that I know nothing about them."

SHORTLY thereafter, Gus Snow went to his berth....a little hole in the wall, with a hard bunk, one battered chair, and a bureau for his clothes. The books were in his hand and he snorted as he glanced at the titles. "They sound harmless to me!"

He took up "Fanatics of Mercury" and studied the jacket....a reproduction of the author's photograph that stood in the windows of Surinam and Slidell's. "The man looks honest; there's no guile in him or I'm no judge of human character," he declared.

Gus ran his eye down the opening paragraph patronizingly. He glanced at the second page. He leaned against the bureau and scanned the third and fourth, meanwhile scratching his head. "H'm," he mumbled, frowning thoughtfully. "H'm!" He sat down on the bunk, spread the book upon his knees and went back to the beginning.

Hours later, Gus Snow's physical being, jacketless and with his shirt collar unbuttoned, reclined comfortably upon his bunk, but his soul was off adventuring on super-tropic Mercury, millions of miles away.

All through the afternoon he had been absorbing the tall tale of the Fanatics and washing down its weird, more blood curdling passages with chasers of Four Roses.

The little cubby-hole had changed into a mud-bricked hut in a wild jungle of club moss plants; the sound of a ship blasting off was the distant voice of a belching volcano, and the three-inch cockroaches which scurried up the bulkheads and paused, antennae waving, to contemplate him,

were air-ants, *fangaroos*, or bouncing spores, according to the text before him. So powerful was the spell that even his lesser insectile roommates, the bedbugs, were transformed into giant beetles which bit lustily as crocodiles.

"Better be careful!" he murmured, glancing fearfully at the floor. "I must beware of the deadly protoplasm fever!" He drained the flask and prudently opened another in readiness to ward off beetalisis, the rust death, or whatever Mercurian disease might be lurking in the next chapter.

It was well that he took this precaution for by the last page of the book he had conquered riff bite, fought off a touch of fire fever and survived the wound of a poisoned arrow, all by virtue of nipping them in the bud.

And when, in the final harrowing paragraphs, he had rushed through the awful jungle, thrown himself into the scalding waters of a river and swam to safety through the boiling liquid, with the moaning and gibbering of the Fanatics ringing in his ears, he would have been exhausted by the strain of it all had not a few nips remained in the flask.

He gasped as the book slipped from his nerveless fingers and he wrapped them tight around the flasp for support. "I've read nothing that has moved me so! Read did I say? No, lived....for surely all this is no mere illusion!"

He glanced up at a cockroach on the steel-beamed ceiling. The cockroach changed into three air-ants. "See, of course it's real!" he assured himself. "What more proof do I need?" The air-ants merged into a single yellowish animal of uncertain form which was walking upside down

and humming snatches of "The Spaceman's Lament." "Good gosh, it's a female *Gok* with her young!" he exclaimed delightedly. "The first specimens I have seen this season. Remember the old quotation: 'A *Gok* a day keeps the glooms away!' But horrors!" he stared through the port-hole at the rain-blurred lights of the city and dashed through the air-locks to the ground. "Why, I do believe, yes, it's the spring *floodula!* The river's rising! I must press on to the settlement at once!"

DESPITE the danger of being swept away by the torrent, Gus Snow was too shrewd a planeteer to leave tell-tale tracks behind him, and so, for the first few blocks on the ground level after leaving the space-yards, he waded ankle deep in the gurgling gutters of Tenth Avenue.

When he felt that he had shaken off his pursuers, he took to the beaten trail along the sidewalk, but even there some instinct urged him to zigzag in his course.

He wished he'd thought to put on his shoes, a raincoat, or to carry an umbrella, but the bloodthirsty Fanatics had attacked so suddenly that he'd barely had time to save the flask, the precious flask. And now, to make a bad situation more dangerous, the flask was empty!

Walking, running, tripping, sprawling he made his way through the peril-filled night. Sinister figures stirred in the shadows and he sought concealment behind the impenetrable bulk of a massive boulder which spread as broadly as a New York mail box.

"Mercy!" he groaned, "it's the Fanatics on the war-path! If I only had my Ion Incinerator, now, or even an ordinary rifle!"

Suddenly, Fanatics darted out into the downpour and jumped into a subway kiosk. "Good lord!" gasped Gus, "I hardly expected they'd risk it, and at the very outskirts of the settlement, too!"

Steeling himself to the ordeal, he broke from cover and sprinted the remaining distance to the settlement, which, oddly enough, bore a sign, "The Space-Blaster's Barroom." He had won through!

"The Fanatics!" he shouted as he staggered to the bar. "The Fanatics are coming! They're out there in thousands and they got the place surrounded!"

For a moment, stunned silence fell upon the room; then a bloodshot individual who had spent the evening in a corner arguing with a spittoon lurched to his feet and rasped, "Fanatics? Let me at 'em!" and went wobbling out through the side door.

"Why, Gus!" exclaimed the grizzled bartender, an ex-spacedog, and added, "What's the matter with you? You're not wearing any shoes and you're soakin' wet!"

"Jimmy!" Snow stumbled forward and wrung the barkeep's hand. "Ah, Jimmy, good ole Jim, so you're safe and sound! Thank heavens my message reached you in time!"

"Message? Oh, yes, the message to be sure!" agreed Jimmy, rising to the emergency with rare professional tact. "I was certainly overjoyed to hear from you, Gus, and now that you're arrived, I hope you'll join me in a little drink on the house."

He prepared a Blaster's Blow-off which consisted of cayenne pepper, tabasco, chili sauce, with a dash of horseradish thrown in to stabilize it against spontaneous combustion.

Although the Blow-off was highly

efficient in sobering up patrons who had overtaxed themselves, it could have been used with just as good results in the welding, and smelting industries as well as for rocket fuel.

Gus Snow took a long draft of it, smacked his lips and heaved a contented sigh.

"Smooth!" he announced blandly. "Rich and bodily! Jimmy, my good ole pal, there's nothing that can touch this Mercurian *Kot*!"

"Did I hear him say *Kot*?" snickered a whizened individual at a nearby table. "*Kot!* Hell's blast!"

"Yes, *Kot*," Gus frowned at the old fellow and turned back to the bartender. "As I was saying, Jimmy, this pure *Kot* is distilled from the hot water sacs of the beautiful *Pinkee* flower. It is not only dee-licious, but it soothes the nerves as well.... thank you, Jimmy; yes, I'll have another with pleasure!"

Gus leaned against the bar, eyes closed dreamily, as the liquid fire coursed through his veins. He raised a hand to his sweat-beaded brow as though trying to corner some elusive memory.

"*Kot? Kot?* Ah, at last! It all comes back to me now. Er....umnever shall I forget my introduction to *Kot*, comma, which occurred at a village called Smess, semicolon, before describing it, comma, however, comma, I believe that a brief account of my adventures en route will be in order, period. Alone and unaccompanied, comma, I struck northwards from Fatimi and up into the dread mountains of madness, period, paragraph. The...."

"Garbage!" This amazing outburst came from the wizened one. "Garbage of the foulest odor!" He laughed derisively.

"**M**EY DEAR SIR," Gus addressed the old man in frigid tones, "you're very rude and, if it wasn't for your age, I'd be likely to punch your nose for that."

The tense hush which followed this announcement was broken only by certain sloshing, seething sounds from Gus' interior as the superheated Blaster's Blow-off swarmed down upon the Four Roses, engulfed it in liquid fire and evaporated it from his system quicker than a hungry cat laps up a bowl of grade A milk.

The result was miraculous. Before his eyes the besieged settlement on the hothouse planet reshaped itself as the Space-Blaster's Barroom; the hideous screeching of the Fanatics became sirens whining on express monorail cars and what had lately been a scalding downpour calmed down to a gentle summer rain. It was all so abrupt that it was confusing.

"Why, he doesn't know what he's talkin' 'bout!" the wrinkled man was declaring with scorn. "Mountains of madness! Why, there ain't a hill on all that planet much less a mountain! Down towards Fatimi there's mostly sandy desert, and in the nitrate beds, where I was working as a...."

"Hold it!" Gus Snow was suddenly aware that the company was viewing him with skepticism, if not hostility; he hastened to regain face. "Do you mean to say that you've tramped on good ole Merky, too? My, my, isn't it a small solar system after all! Then I've no doubt that you know or at least are acquainted with my good friend, Commander Monte Maurice Montross?"

"Montross? Montebank Montross? Ho, ho! He's the writer feller that

was drunk for ten weeks in Fatimi, between liners. Do I know him? The farthest he ever got from town was the time he went to the soddy beds. He tried to sober up by sleeping in the field and nearly died of sunbake....But what about him?"

"Oh, nothing," stammered Gus Snow. "I....I was merely asking that's all." And without another word, he made for the exit.

As he made his way shipwards in his sodden carpet slippers, he was gnawed by a terrible suspicion. Was it possible that the old ancient had spoken truly? Ugh, the very thought was repugnant! For a while....a priceless pleasant smile....Commander Montross' magic words had opened the broad realms of adventure. And now the spell was broken! Gus Snow could feel commonplace and workaday New York hemming him in on every side. Could it be that Montross....Commander Montross....the dashing do-or-die plant explorer, soldier of fortune and author....was a liar? It was impossible! And the midget Doubt grew into an overwhelming giant.

CHAPTER III

THE NEXT day dawned prettily, but Gus Snow, unenergetic and brooding, lay in his bunk. His memories of the night before were sadly confused, but they included a definite doubt of Commander Montross' veracity. The doubt was ever growing. "Damn," he growled. "If it's as I suspect, the commander's a menace to the youth of the system."

About eleven o'clock he felt equal to facing his breakfast. He found the fried egg well-done, as usual;

but this particular morning it seemed especially revolting.

He scooped up about half the contents of his bowl before he identified it. "Icky!" he shuddered, recoiling. "It's chili sauce!" He remembered the unpleasant power of the drink Jimmy, the bartender, had given him the night before.

He dashed away from the table, intending to find the cook, who was temporarily substituting for the recalcitrant Jack Teagarden, when:

"Pardon me, sir, but a gentleman named Commander Montross is here to see the cook," announced a sailor from the doorway, and over the sill stepped the original of the jacket illustration of "Fanatics of Mercury!"

"Oh....I beg your indulgence," excused the adventurer, glancing about him uncertainly. "It was Mr. Teagarden I wanted to see."

"He's not here!" snapped Gus Snow, still tasting the chili sauce.

"Oh I'm sorry! You see, I came aboard this morning to have a chat with him and put him in the way of earning a little spot cash."

"What? How much money?" asked Gus, waving the visitor to a seat.

"Oh, not a great deal," the other shrugged. "It's only a little favor he could do for me for which I'd gladly pay five or ten dollars."

"Let's make it fifteen dollars," suggested Gus, smiling charmingly. "As his superior officer, it's of course my duty to guard his financial interests. But I'm afraid, Commander, that you won't see him until the day we sail, Friday."

"Is that right? But it won't do! I'm leaving the city tomorrow and I've really got to break this story in the papers and on the air then."

"To what story are you referring, Commander?"

Commander Montross drummed on the table for a thoughtful second; then he leaned forward and impaled Gus with his eye. The effect was that of one charlatan gazing at another. "Look here," he said confidentially. "Jack needn't be in on this at all. Come to think of it, sir, your own intelligent assistance would be ever so much more valuable to me."

He paused as if an afterthought struck him. "Er...by the way, sir, you didn't tell me your name."

"Snow. Gus Snow. Please excuse my omission and go on, Commander."

"Well, I'm sure you know me by reputation, Mr. Snow."

"Of course, of course. Jack often talks of you....in fact, you're his idol. And even I have read some of your adventures and been deeply intrigued by them."

"That's fine! Now, sir, I wonder if it ever occurred to you that modern interplanetary adventure is a business, just like any other, with financing and advertising and sales talks and so on. Just to roam away to Neptune or Pluto isn't enough, these days! To be successful, an exploring expedition has got to have an idea behind it....a new slant on which the publicity can be based. Otherwise the papers won't consider you, the radio commentators won't mention you, the fans will desert you, your books won't sell and, perhaps, even the movies. In other words, to get the jack, you've got to cook up something dramatic.

Gus Snow leaned across the table and poked the author playfully in the ribs. "Well, what are we waiting for? Let's start the cooking!"

The Commander grinned, drew a typewritten sheet from his pocket and handed it across the table. "Tomorrow morning every paper in the city will carry this advertisement. And the radios will flash it over the continent and the world. Read it:

Gus did; it read:

\$500.00 REWARD

Five hundred dollars will be paid by me through my bankers for information as to the fate of Thomas Adamy. As far as is known, Adamy was last seen alive on December 18th in Psang-Pano, Neptune, at which time he was planning a lone expedition into the back country in search of a lost race of reptiles living in the bowels of the planet. Can anyone furnish information concerning his present whereabouts, whether living or dead? If dead, can anyone furnish indisputable proof of Adamy's death? If you can, the reward is waiting for you. Apply in person to the Eleventh National Bank in New York City.

(Signed) Commander Monte Maurice Montross.

THE first mate frowned as he read the advertisement. "I was in Psang-Pano, Neptune on December 18th myself. But I'm afraid I can't make sense out of this."

"You will!" Montross looked up from another slip of paper upon which he had been penciling corrections. "I'm substituting your name for Teagarden's," he explained. "And here is the item which will appear in tomorrow's evening editions. See!"

Gus Snow read:

PLANET EXPLORER SEEKS
LONG-LOST FRIEND. MONTROSS
POSTS REWARD, PLANS EXPEDI-
TION TO FIND ADAMY, LONG
MISSING. CLUE TO NEPTUNE

MYSTERY IN N. Y. BOOKSTORE

A trail which may lead halfway through the Solar System, through the wilds of Neptune, and end in either an underground realm of reptiles or an earthman's grave, was brought to light in dramatic fashion Saturday when Commander Monte Maurice Montross, the well-known planet explorer and author, chanced to make the acquaintance of Mr. August Snow in a N. W. Speedway bookshop. Snow brought the first news of Montross' friend and colleague, Thomas Adamy, who left Earth last May on a mystery journey the object of which he refused to divulge. Grave fears have been entertained for his safety ever since. According to Mr. Snow, who is the first mate of the S. S. (*Space Ship Solarium*, now resting in cradle 217 of the municipal spaceyards, Adamy was in Psang-Pano until December 18th, on which date he was planning a lone search for a lost tribe of reptiles believed to have their abode somewhere in Neptune's hollow depths and called "The Hissing Ones." Both the Commander and Mr. Snow fear that if Adamy is not dead, he soon will be. The Hissing Ones are known to be meat-eaters. "Although I have advertised a five-hundred dollar reward for further information, I haven't much hope of anyone claiming it," said Montross yesterday. "I am certain that poor Adamy is in dire need of help and I am working night and day organizing an expedition to find him."

GUS SNOW read this with astonishment. "But what, Commander! I never knew a man named Tom Adamy in my life!"

"No, of course you didn't," chuckled Montross. "How could you, when

there isn't any such person? But I'm depending on you to stick to the story and dish it out to the reporters who'll come to check up on all this tomorrow. To be frank, Mr. Snow, the gentlemen of the fourth estate don't put much faith in me. And that's why I'm paying you fifteen dollars for your confirmation of the story. My word!"

The planet explorer sat back and laughed heartily. "You didn't think I'd put up those five hundred hard-earned dollars for somebody to come along and snatch, did you? Of course not! The whole thing is really done for publicity's sake, just publicity's sake. It'll advertise my next expedition and the book I'll write about it. A search for a lost friend is a fine, dramatic, human-interest angle. The thing's a cinch, can't you see it?"

"Lord, what cleverness!" Gus Snow's face was wreathed in a flattering smile. "Accept my congratulations! Why the plan is marvelous . . . in fact, it's all but fool-proof!"

"Just a minute," said Commander Montross, "what's wrong with it?" His eyes challenged Snow.

"Oh, it's just a minor detail, and my judgment may be wrong," said Gus diffidently. "But I think that 'Thomas Adamy' is not the name to call your character. There are too many real Tom Adamys in the world and system to risk having the fond but dishonest relatives of a dead one show up and claim the money. Besides, the name is not memorable enough to register with the public. Tom! Nope, won't do! Too much country bumpkin in it. To my mind, an explorer should have an unusual name, an adventurous name . . . in fact, Commander, your own handle is a fine one."

"I think you've got something

there!" agreed Commander Montross. Glad you raised the point, Mr. Snow. Adamy won't do, now that you've mentioned it! But, unfortunately, it's not easy to find another. Shall we call him Richardson? Or perhaps Alexander?"

"Alexander? Sounds good! Yes, Emmanuel Alexander! But hold everything. How about Tolliver? Ah, Tolliver, there's a beautiful name! Jack....no, Oliver Tolliver! There!"

"Tolliver? Oliver Tolliver? Great! It's a masterpiece! And Oliver Tolliver it is! Much obliged for the thought."

Montross arose, laid the fifteen dollars on the table and shook hands with Snow. "I must run along, now. Got to get this stuff to the papers and stations. Then, I'm off for Neptune!"

"Good-bye, Commander," said Gus as he pocketed the money. "It's been a very great pleasure to meet you and you can depend on me to tell the tale right when the newshounds come. Friday, of course, we shove off."

"I wish you a pleasant voyage, then," declared the Commander as he gazed at the face of his watch. "Long trip?"

"No," gloomed Gus Snow, "only to Ganymede. It will be rather tiresome."

IT WAS Thursday morning and Gus Snow was eating breakfast. He stowed the food away with one hand and gripped a newspaper with the other. "Here it is, in black and white!" he exclaimed as the advertisement met his eye. "Oliver Tolliver, five hundred reward and all the rest of it....as binding as any legal contract! Well, well, wait'll Jack Teagarden sees this! This will 'bolish

them silly ideas out of his head! But now....Jones! Oh, Jones!" he called. "Will you please ask the substitute cook to come here at once?"

The substitute cook, a tall, gangling fellow with a scare-crow expression on his face appeared beside the table. "Please, sir," he began guiltily, "if it's that cereal I served you...."

Gus Snow sprang up. "Yes," he thundered, "it's about that cereal you served yesterday and something more!" He advanced upon the trembling cook and thrust his finger in his face. "Where were you on December 18th, 2039?"

"Why, why....Let me see....I was in Psang-Pano on that nasty planet Neptune they call it, I think. But, please, sir, if its the chili sauce taste you're complainin' of, I swear to God that there ain't a single drop of it on the ship, and...."

"What's your true name?" belched the first mate menacingly.

"O-O-Oliver Tolliver, sir," quavered the cook. "But, please, sir, if that cereal ain't...."

"Say no more," ordered Snow. "Take off that apron, bring your passport and any papers that will identify you, and come along with me to the Eleventh National Bank!

"If you stick to your story and back up my own, I might forget your nauseating cereal and not have you canned as you deserve. Perhaps," he added in a burst of unusual generosity, "when I've collected that reward, I'll treat you to a pack of cigarettes or a soda pop, maybe!"

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SKY RAIDERS

At All Stands

10c

(Continued From Page 85)

It was near now, growing huge. Mark's ray went out and broke in blinding lightning flashes. The screen was on. A rocking detonation threw Mark's ship aside. The Martians had missed with an atomic bomb. Another detonation pealed out and this time the Martian warship spun like a top. Daniewicz, at one of the battle ports, was doing a good job.

Then the Martian ship dropped in a vicious curve, under them. Its powerful induction beam flashed out, and this time Mark's ship was not grounded. Mark's controls were suddenly very hot in his hands. Their screen was leaking, going fast, the metal of the ship heating with powerful eddy currents.

Then again the astounding thing happened. Mark Richards could scarcely believe his eyes.

The Martian ship was falling, out of control, headlong toward the ground. Even as it fell it was changing, flowing into an incandescent drop of molten metal. It fell with a hiss of smoke past the carpet of leaves and crashed among the domes below. Not one, but three powerful beams from the power station had followed it almost to the ground.

"That is that," said Mark Richards, watching the smoking ruin below.

Instantly he shot the ship up, up, into the ceiling of clouds and beyond—out into star-strewn space, out of reach of those terrible beams. There he could think again.

WELL, Purple-skull," he said after awhile, "I can forgive you for all those nasty cracks when we were down in the pit. I realize you had to fool those fellows mentally as well as—"

"I didn't fool them," said Herb, grinning broadly. "I was sincere. They knew it."

Mark's big hands twitched, but he swallowed the profanity.

"All right, we'll pass that for the moment," he said. "But you seem to be in the know. How do you explain the ray those boys tossed at the Martians?"

"Simple," grinned Herb. "I told you these people weren't backward, except in weapons. They had power aplenty, in the sweetest little accumulators you ever saw, but they didn't know how to throw it around at each other. They only knew how

to make it run tube cars and flying machines."

"Then you—"

"I showed 'em. I helped them build ray cannon of a size you won't find outside of forts on Mars and Earth. It was easy. We had the ship's guns to go by, and Red-skull was a lot brighter than he looked."

"But why?" fumed Mark. "You know the laws against divulging military information to alien races. You can be burned for it. Why did you—"

"I liked these people," Herb cut in. "They'll never use those weapons for anything but self-defense. It's about time our barge brothers from the System ran into something they have to respect!"

"Well—I'm—damned," said Mark for the second time.

They were startled by a howl of anguish from Daniewicz, who was not in the room.

"I thought so," Dan was wailing, and the sound came from a speaking tube. "I knew it. Wait, you birds, I'm coming up."

He came in the door a moment later, carrying a shiny hermetic packing case.

"I suspected as much," he was groaning, his lean face longer than a Jovian Totem. "To think we spent the best days of our lives in that rat-hole for nothing. Damn you, Mark, if you only knew your own ship—"

"What are you talking about?" snapped Mark. "Out with it."

Daniewicz pointed to an end of the packing case.

It had the usual label, marked "roast beef" in fancy lettering, several seals of inspection, and down in the corner in small letters:

"Synthetic."

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MARVELO



Illustration by Bok

VENUS kept her vigil late that night in Central Park, for summer was over and the winding walks and benches for two were nearly empty.

"Our love," Pete crooned softly, "is a dream but in my reverie—." He broke off as Julie's head eased on to his shoulder. "What's the matter, hon?"

(What is that singing I hear?)

"Nothin', lovey. Only—it's a funny night to be out with you."

(It's calling me, calling like the women you dream about—only you always wake up before you find them.)

His voice did not betray the thoughts surging within him. "Most natural thing in the world, Julie. Here we've been working in the same department—basement hosiery—for two whole years, and we only got to notice each other two weeks ago. It must be love, Julie—must be somethin' that's been growing and growing all the time."

(Is this love—is it Julie? It's calling, calling. Julie? Maybe I want to kiss her now.)

She looked up into his face and

THE OOMPH BEASTS

Out of Nowhere They Came, the
Strangest Creatures Ever to Menace
Mankind — and the Most Deadly!

saw that it was shadowed by leaves, was strangely sallow in the subdued glow of the park's new sodium lights. "Yes," she murmured, moving her body closer, "it must be love."

He put his thoughts into action: held her face in his hands and kissed her lips lingeringly. There was a singing in his brain and a thundering in his veins. "Julie," he breathed, holding her still more tightly until she gasped for breath.

(Who is this woman?)

She pushed him away, gently. "Pete, you live with your folks, don't you?"

"Sure do, hon. But they can get along without me; they're not dependent on my salary. Why do you ask?"

She snuggled closer. "I don't know. But I was thinking—if people like us—you and me—really love each other, they shouldn't let anything stand in the way of their happiness. Do you think you could support a wife, Pete?" Holding her breath, she studied his face.

By Millard
Verne Gordon

Pete grinned. "I guess so, Julie," he replied.

(Why can't you leave me alone. I love Julie. Julie. I want Julie. Oh, God, make her stop singing—calling me. I want Julie. Julie.)

"Sure," he went on reflectively, "we can get hitched in about a month." He kissed her again; she began to sniffle and sob. "What's the matter, hon?"

"Nothin', Pete—only, I'm so happy about you." Her eyes were shining behind the bright veil of tears. This time she kissed him.

(I'm not listening, damn you, not listening. Can you hear me? I won't listen. Go away!)

He disengaged himself slowly. "There's someone poking around," he said, breathing heavily. "Must be a peeping-tom. I'll break his neck."

(I'm coming—coming now. Wait. Please wait. I'm coming.)

Julie listened intently, thinking she heard a little rustling noise. She blushed suddenly, her face darkening under the sodium lights. She felt her pulses throb strangely. "What is it, Petie?" she whispered frightenedly.

(Yes! Yes! I'm coming. Don't leave me; I'm coming.)

She felt unreasoning terror sweep over. Her fingers clutched him spasmodically. "Don't go, Pete," she pleaded. "It'll go away—I mean *she* will." At once she laughed, almost hysterically. "What did I call a peeping-tom *she* for?" Julie felt feverish; she was trembling as if with a chill as she felt Pete slip away from her, stand up and turn about slowly, trying to locate the sound of the disturbance.

"Wait!" she gasped. "Don't go, Pete—don't go alone. Let me come with you!"

He waved her back, started off into

the underbrush in the direction of the lake. Julie sprang to her feet as he vanished in the shadows, then fell back limply, sick and ashamed in every fibre of her body, trembling helplessly in the grip of terrible waves of emotion that swept over her.

A cry sounded from the underbrush and Julie bared her teeth and began to weep. When the fever passed and she could move again, she reeled into the bushes, following Pete's trail. It ended in blood and the ragged bits of a body hastily eaten.

"Pete," she moaned. "Pete, Pete, why did you listen to her?"

HOLD it a minute, Kate," said Dr. Yarrow, scribbling short-hand onto a pad. His wife stood by patiently until he looked up. "What's cooking?"

"They want you at the Center—now," replied the tall, grey-haired woman. "Special messenger. Here's the slip."

Yarrow studied the flimsy with a furrowed brow. "Know anything about this business?"

"Not a thing. Since when do endocrinologists get summoned on life-or-death cases?"

The doctor stretched himself as he rose from the stiff-back chair and scratched his thatch of wiry white hair. "Well—" he began uncertainly—"come on."

There was a cab waiting for them at the door of the specialist's combined home and office; as soon as Yarrow had slammed the door, it tore off through traffic. Five sharp corners were rounded, then the vehicle plunged down a straightaway on the Third-Avenue ramp. The woman grimaced as she saw the speedometer

touch seventy. "The hackie has his orders," she observed. With a breathtaking jolt the cab pulled up before the Uptown Medical Center at 168th street.

As Yarrow took a deep breath, the door was yanked open. "Hello," snapped an agitated man to the two, "get moving, will you. We have a case in the Neuro-vascular lab—" The Yarrows followed the man, almost running, into an elevator that whisked them up to Floor Seven, the Alexis Carrel Memorial Laboratories. Yarrow took his guide firmly by the shoulders. "Joe," he said, "calm down. Tell us what's going on and maybe we can help you people out."

"Come on," snapped the man, hauling on the white-haired specialist's arm. "You *must* see this case before he dies." He rolled aside the door, and Yarrow walked through, his wife close behind. The specialist nodded curtly at the familiar faces with which the room was thronged—doctors, surgeons, psychiatrists, biologists—and bent over the center of attention, which reposed on the operating table in the center of the room, covered by a transparent sheet.

"Mangled," said Yarrow, studying the man. "And you don't know what chewed him up, of course." He whipped a tiny gauge from his pocket and thrust its keen-pointed tip into the stump of the patient's shoulder. The man shuddered, twitched once, then slumped flabbily. The specialist looked curiously at the figure, then at his gauge. He returned the gleaming little instrument to his pocket, frowning.

"Henry," said one of the observers.

"Hello, Ryan. You still a neurologist?"

"Yes. What do you make of that mess?"

Yarrow hesitated. "Probably," he answered, "no more than any of you. Did anyone try to work out the dental formula of whatever got at this man?"

"Can't be done," an ostiologist snapped. "Either the thing that bit him didn't have teeth, or it had the insanest set of all time. No wild beasts loose from the zoo, of course. And even if there were, it wouldn't help. How about his endocrines? Did you have time for a test?"

"Yes," said Yarrow. He drew out his gauge again and read from its little slide. "Present in the blood stream (a) no traces whatsoever of adrenalin, (b) utterly unprecedented amounts of testacoid."

"What does that indicate?" asked the ostiologist.

"Before I decide for myself," said Yarrow, "I want to find out a little more about the circumstances of this—accident. Who was around at the time?"

"His widow's in there, having a breakdown?" replied a psychiatrist. "I can't do a thing with her. This business has its angles, all right."

"Kate," said Yarrow to his wife.

The quiet, greyish woman stepped to his side. "I'll go in and see what I can get out of her," she said as she went through the door.

"Hope she doesn't cause an open lesion," worried the psychiatrist.

"Not a chance," replied Yarrow. "When Kate sets her mind on a job, you just sit back and wait, because it's as good as done. Light up, gentlemen. I give my wife about two hours."

Matches flared, and the assembled medicos, commitments forgotten, gratefully eased themselves into chairs and blued the atmosphere with smoke.



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KATE YARROW emerged from the room almost two hours on the dot later. Calmly she poured herself a glass of water. "Fred," she said to the psychiatrist, "you leave her alone for a few days, see that she has absolutely no problems of any sort, and I think she'll get over it."

"What about the details on the case?" asked her husband. "Did you get anything?"

"Only enough to drive me slightly mad. It happened in Atlantic City, you know—they were on the beach after dark, Mr. and Mrs. Kevin of Eastport, Long Island were, and Mrs. Kevin went up to powder her nose. When she came back her husband had been chewed. Those are the bare, incontrovertible facts—the rest that I found out is purely observation—perhaps faulty, or misinterpreted—on the part of Mrs. Kevin.

"But the rest—" The woman paused.

"Go on, Kate," said Yarrow.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Yarrow, slowly. "I don't want to throw you people off track. But this is what she told me. She said that they were on the beach late, about ten o'clock. They had a little canvas shelter, the kind they're selling this year, and she was talking to her husband about nothing in particular. When I asked she said that they were almost in the dark, except for a little standing-lamp that was behind their backs—regulation, so that one of the beach-tractors wouldn't run over them, I think. Mrs. Kevin excused herself, said she'd be right back. She felt uneasy, she remembered." The woman shut her lips tightly and was lost in thought.

"Well?" asked a surgeon.

The doctor's wife continued with a start. "This feeling of uneasiness

—I couldn't get much out of it except that she felt as though there were something near them, disturbing the air. Those were her very words. But it couldn't be the air, of course—it was something deeper and more basic. When I got deeper into the business, she admitted that it must have been something she heard; then she reversed herself and said it was a smell. I suggested that it might have been both, and she instantly agreed. This much I established—if the word of a half-crazed woman can be taken as significant—that she was impelled to leave by perceiving a presence which was abnormal and—again I use her very words—“competing.”

There was a little, amazed stir among the medicos; Kate continued tersely: “That's the only new evidence I found. The rest is on her word. She came back to find Mr. Kevin nearly dead. She collapsed, and—remark this—remembers before her collapse the same smells and sounds which at first alarmed her and made her almost physically ill. That is all.”

“Thanks, Kate,” said Yarrow. Then to the assemblage, “Any more questions, gentlemen?”

The psychiatrist rose at once. “What do you make of the state of Mrs. Kevin?” he asked. “It appears to be like nothing in my very extensive experience with hysterical women.”

“Not as extensive as it might be, doctor,” said Mrs. Yarrow. “Many years ago, I made a living as a psychoanalyst, catering particularly to my own sex. I found a very definite relation between a certain class of my patients and the poor woman I have just examined. I refer,” she said

(Continued On Page 104)

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(Continued From Page 103)
slowly, "to infidelity cases. Yes, by the standards of iritic distention, inhibition of reflexes, pigmentation, and other clues of the body that explain the state of mind, Mrs. Kevin, whether she knows it or now, is suffering, not only from grief due to the loss of her husband, but from the most advanced case of *jealousy* I have ever encountered."

NO," said Yarrow, "show me this person who, with fiendish cunning and endless resources, has spent years of his time in the analysis of the problem of genitoid polarity and then, the world knowing nothing of his plans and accomplishments, causes the deaths of scores of people for purposes unknown and seemingly irrational." He leaned back in his study chair and inhaled deeply on a slim, light cigar.

His wife smiled grimly. "I wouldn't know," she said. "In desperate situations of this order, we have to work on desperate theories—or none at all. Am I right?"

"In this case, no!" Agitatedly Yarrow sprang to his feet and began to pace the length of the dim, high-ceilinged old room. "A case like this is pure hypothesis," he snapped. "What we're up against, we don't know. The facts—or what are confusedly referred to as facts—are patent. People, men always, under varying conditions of lighting and atmosphere, march off to their dooms. Source of said dooms being as yet unknown."

"And women," added Mrs. Yarrow, softly smoothing her grey hair, "women are frightfully disorganized in a most complex manner. It is possible that in those cases in which women have been rendered completely insane, they have seen the—doms,

The Oomph Beasts

as you called them.... At least so I think."

"Adrenalin, none," exploded Yarrow. "Testacoid, an utterly unprecedented amount poured into the bloodstream. This is a nightmare from stem to stern, Kate. They met their end quietly."

Mrs. Yarrow thought of the ragged thing she had seen at the hospital two days before, and shuddered. "Quietly," she almost spat. "Chewed to a pulp—eaten—how could—" Her iron control almost deserted her; she set her teeth against a mountain wave of hysteria.

"Quietly," said the endocrinologist defiantly. "The test I crowded in before Kevin died indicated as much. While he was being eaten, there was not one suspicion in his mind that whatever he had been drawn to meant his harm. And the second factor—the testacoid, is maddening."

"Yes?" asked Kate.

"While meeting a horrible death," said Dr. Yarrow precisely, "the only thought in Kevin's mind was lust—fearful, unprecedented lust for the body of a woman."

His wife said nothing. She was drained dry by the grueling, yet fruitful analysis that had cost them so much labor. Her eyes drifted to the library table, on which lay the day's papers. Squat, black headlines roared:

"Mystery Plague Baffles Scientists
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UNDER the ramp, cobbled West street was quiet. The ceaseless roar of early-morning trucks rushing vegetables and fruit and meat into the city, fresh from farms and slaughterhouses, had quieted by nine

(Continued On Page 106)

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Future Fantasy and Science Fiction

(Continued From Page 105)

o'clock, and Flannelmouth Geraghty was lounging against the bar of a cafeteria, glad of a chance to straighten out after steady hours of driving, wrenching the balky wheel of a truck around the hairpin turns of city traffic.

"Mother!" he growled, clicking down his thick mug of coffee. "What's that?" There was a confused roar in the street. He emptied the cup down his gullet and shoved a nickel across the counter. If it was a brawl, he wanted to see. Flannelmouth was a mean scrapper himself, but always willing to pick up points on technique when he had the chance.

"What's up?" He hooked an arm into the elbow of a passing bruiser headed his way.

"Don't ask me, bud—I just heard it like you," said the bruiser, untangling himself and hurrying on. Flannelmouth switched his nightgoggles up on his short forehead and squinted through the gloomy shadows that the ramp cast on the pavement. It was a crowd—a big one, half of them streaming toward the still unidentified center of excitement.

He was conscious of a stirring in the neighborhood of his bosom. He glanced at a passing floozie, who looked at him coldly and redoubled her speed away from the disturbance down the street.

"C'mon," said Flannelmouth, breaking into a trot. He reached the fringes of the crowd winded and strangely disturbed. He heard something that was like the swish of silk. "You," he growled, taking a man by the shoulder and swinging him full around, "what's up?"

"Something up there on the dock," replied the man dreamily. "You feel it in the air and all around you. Out they came from the water and onto the dock . . ."

Flannelmouth stared at the man incredulously. A shrill cry filled the air. "Here they come—" rang out under the gloomy ramp.

The crowd surged forward, spreading out. If this was a new kind of cop, Geraghty thought, he'd be ready. His friend, who had uttered a wordless cry, pressed forward. Flannelmouth followed him through the mill and press of the men gathered there, his head growing lighter and somehow clearer.

The sounds he had heard were redoubled, and he could smell something in the air as he pressed through defiantly. It was a

sweet, perfumy smell—one that he could not describe to himself. But his directional powers were nearly gone—his feet were moving of their own will to the center of the throng, off the street onto a dock abutting the river, where a stirring knot of men blocked off all vision.

He heard a voice, or something like it, and a shred of reserve was blown away. It was the sweetest, most impelling voice he had ever heard. Instinctively he hunched his shoulders into a battering ram and plowed through the dazed, aimless gang.

Then he saw—it. It was not moving, and, for an unbearable moment, he thought he would go mad from sheer delight. It moved, first quickly, then more slowly, then with a shimmer of light. Blood was thundering through his veins; his breath was coming faster and his clothing choked him.

He did not know that he had moved until he touched it, nor did he come to his senses for the long three minutes it had to do with him. And, after that, being unspeakably mangled there would have been little point for Flannelmouth Geraghty to awake.

HIS HONOR lit his allegedly beloved meerschaum pipe with much distaste and snapped through his mike, "Send them in, please."

Through the veneered iron door of his office filed a strangely assorted crew, Mrs. Yarrow leading. "Sit down," said the mayor, squinting down his nose at the bowl of his pipe. They sat gingerly.

"Glad you could come," said the mayor. He looked at his notes. "Very glad," he added uneasily, searching for page one. "Ah," remarked the mayor upon finding it.

"The purpose of this meeting which I have called," he began smoothly, "is on the question of the deaths and disappearances which have become all too frequent of late.

There was a murmur from the gathering.

"I know that some of you have been occupying yourselves with the problem; in brief what I ask from you all is—a little more speed. I have no doubt that you are proceeding in the best lights according to your profession—" His Honor faltered as he saw a particularly angry woman rise to her feet.

"You!" exploded grey-haired Kate Yarrow. "Who in Hades do you think you are, and what do you think you're doing right now? Calling us from our lab and field

(Continued On Page 108)



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(Continued From Page 107)
work to hear your damned little speech! If you haven't anything more to say, we'll leave right now and save ourselves and you some time." Buzzing and applause from the medicos seated before the ornate desk of temporal power greeted this statement.

Shaken, his honor removed the beloved meerschaum from his mouth and searched his notes frantically. Nothing covered the situation, it seemed. "I'm sorry, Ma'am," he stammered. "I thought—a little publicity would help your work."

Kate Yarrow almost spat with rage, her face gaunt from hours of unending work, attempting to deduce solid, cogent conclusions from the flimsy evidence that, from the nature of the problem, was the only sort available. "You want," she crackled. "One more word and I'll exercise you with my own bare hands. Listen: if you want to help us, give us commissions in the army or the police or whatever you have charge of—give us access to bombs and guns, then sit back and see what intelligent use we can be after the way your men mowed down citizens because they thought there was a plague spot in the neighborhood. Hear that?"

"Yes," said the mayor meekly.

"Another thing," declared a lean young surgeon. "Get those damned newspapers off our necks, or we can't be responsible for the results. I may slaughter a reporter yet if he comes barging in with a skeleton key to ask me—me, after trying for seventy-four hours of solid labor to find the answer—what causes the trouble." He sat down, rubbing bleary eyes.

"I'll prepare commissions that'll make you special deputies," agreed the mayor, with a cautious glance at the fuming Kate. "I guess there's nothing more I can say except that I'm sorry to have wasted your time."

He rose and the medicos filed out. In the antechamber, Yarrow turned to his wife. "Nice little display," he said genially. "And no doubt you meant every word of it—at the time. Thank heavens I have a wife who knows when and how to lose her temper." He grinned and put an arm about her shoulder. "Everybody here needs some sleep," he announced to all. "Dunno if we'll wake up, or if the plague'll come in at the window, but we can't tackle any problem, any of us, let alone one of this magnitude, in the shape we're all in now."

The Oomph Beasts

There was a murmur of assent from the medicos; faces were white and drawn; many there had developed nervous tics from fatigue.

"Still mad?" the doctor asked his wife.

"Mad? With that—that pimple?" She laughed. "Maybe," she said smiling, "maybe he meant well."

NEXT morning things were gayer. Yarrow dashed into breakfast whistling cheerily. "Guess what I dreamed?" he commanded, gulping coffee.

Kate swallowed a chunk of toast. "Can't imagine," she said.

"No?" Yarrow's face fell. "Well," he replied, "it was a basic law of biology. Toxin—antitoxin!"

"So?" asked his wife coldly.

"Immunization," explained the doctor. "Fight fire with fire. Become accustomed to doses of the stuff—whatever it is—that causes the damned attraction toward the plague-spots. Then we can take it all in one shot whenever it's turned on full force—that is, walk into a plague center—without ill effects, do our work with Tommy guns or what-have-you, and emerge triumphant. No?"

"Requires working on" observed Kate dispassionately. "Likewise the basic solution of our rock-bottom problem. That is 'What causes the attraction; what is the nature of the attraction, and what is inimical to its cause?' See?"

"Mere details," waved Yarrow airily. "You know what we're going to do right now?"

"Haven't the ghost of a notion."

"Pick up some guns, bombs, et cetera, and go hunting for a plague center. Then we fire blind into the center and hope for the best."

"Cops have tried that," objected Kate thoughtfully.

"But without our variation."

"Which is?"

"As follows: we hunt in pairs. My hunch is this," said the doctor, suddenly becoming serious. "After the testacoid content of the blood reaches a certain point and stimulates the proper center of the brain, volition goes bloopo and common sense goes down the drain. The endocrinological analysis of what happens to women is vaguer, but it comes to exactly the opposite. Sexual factors drop to zero in the bloodstream and

(Continued On Page 110)

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Future Fantasy and Science Fiction

(Continued From Page 109)
the psychology, and this abnormal state, throws the female off her trolley. Jealousy is just another name for it."

"Much clearer than ever before," said Kate thoughtfully. "I begin to see what it's all about. Wouldn't it be a great idea to have ear-plugs and nose-stoppers ready?"

"Possibly. Very probably. We'll have them with us. But now—" Dr Yarrow paused grimly. "Now comes the fantastic part. Whatever we're up against exercises almost infinite compulsion. Not all of this can be physically perceived, I'm sure. Theory is that between male and female exists a subtle and powerful life-current of opposite polarity for each sex. Now—our storm-centers, plague spots, or whatever, must raise this polarity—obviously female polarity—to an unheard of degree."

"And what do we do about that?" mused Kate.

"What we've been doing for the greater part of our lives," said Yarrow steadily. "Keep hold of ourselves, remember we're husband and wife, and never forget that there's something stronger existing between us than any damned polarity or glandular stimulation. We have one point in our factor; we know what it is we're up against. The others have no idea. We can also take glandular extracts which will cut out individual polarity to virtually a zero level. Even then... Kate," he concluded earnestly, "I know you can keep your head. I hope I can."

THE endocrinologist held up a small flask of yellow fluid. "We cut this with Ethyl alcohol," he said, "inject it, wait for the jag to wear off, and the patient's ready to go forth and slay legions of the beasties if necessary."

There was a little stir at the door, and the mayor entered. "Good day, gentlemen," he said. Glimpsing Mrs Yarrow, he added hastily, "and ladies." He drew from his pocket the allegedly beloved meerschaum pipe, unconcernedly tossed it into a trash-basket, and lit a cigarette. "Passing of a much-photographed fake," he grinned. "I never could stand the damned thing. Will you begin at the beginning, Dr Yarrow? I mean, what were the plague-spots?"

"Beasts," replied Yarrow. "Beasts from the sea."

"I'm listening," added the mayor. "And

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don't spare the syllables—I went to City College."

"To explain the nature of our opposition," said Yarrow pedantically, "we must analyze what is loosely referred to as beauty. That is, female beauty. The use of the term 'good looks' is erroneous in the extreme, for beauty is almost as much smell, sound, and taste, as sight. Consider the powerful effect of perfumes; consider also the fact that people have fallen in love with radio voices."

There was a murmur of "Agreed!" as he paused.

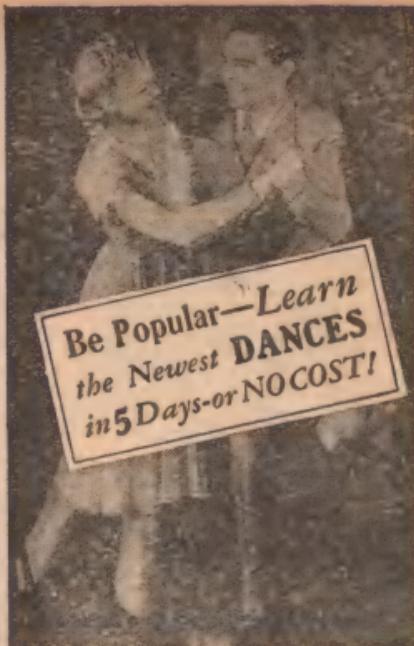
"Thus we see," he continued, "that there are certain factors which combine to form the equation of sex-appeal, as it used to be quite accurately known.

"To digress—the world over, the female is pursued by the male. This is as true of the humming-bird as the mantis; as true of the mastodon as the human being. However, the incentives to pursuit are what make up beauty. Imagine now a species capable of slow adaption over a period of about a score of generations. This species is gifted in one especial line—the solution of the food-supply problem. Nature has bountifully endowed them with a matchless cunning in the operation of their innate technique: the ability to counterfeit the female of any selected species. Not only the counterfeiting, but the outstripping.

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"This is, after all, exactly what our opponents have done. Wishing to achieve the quality of sexual desirability of a human being, they analyzed the factors, and, working along their own lines, achieved this quality a thousand times over."

(Continued On Page 112)



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Future Fantasy and Science Fiction

(Continued From Page 111)

"I'll be damned," said the mayor slowly. "Who has not watched a woman walk down the street?" demanded Yarrow. "The quality of dynamics is a powerful factor in beauty; therefore the beasts in motion are supple. Their voices are sweeter than any woman's (though they sound not at all like any human sound) and in motion they give off a sound apparently derived from swishing fabric. Their scent is more maddening than benzene; their forms, while completely unhuman, are—" Yarrow coughed. "Forgive me," he said. "I think that I am the only man who has seen them and survived. They are indescribable, and I do not use the term loosely."

"That, I think, is all I can tell you about the creatures. You will doubtless see dead specimens in the future."

"But," objected the mayor, "how do we get near them safely?"

"Fight fire with fire," grinned the doctor. "Injections with their serum—such as it is—works a very complicated immunity, with few bad after-effects upon the subject. Such as headaches and memories of subterranean existence. The point is, the serum circulating offers sufficient alien viewpoint to render the beasts almost horrible. At least, there is no compulsion or attraction. Those treated will be glad to destroy the creatures."

"Good," exclaimed the mayor. "But how did you get the serum—from one of the beasts?"

"Yes," said Yarrow. "We found that the victims were all young men and women. Therefore the effect on us would be less pronounced." He flashed a glance at his wife. "Perhaps," he said shakily, "Mrs. Yarrow will be kind enough to tell us the story."

Kate rose with a smile. "Except that it was a great strain on both of us," she replied, "I have nothing further to say."

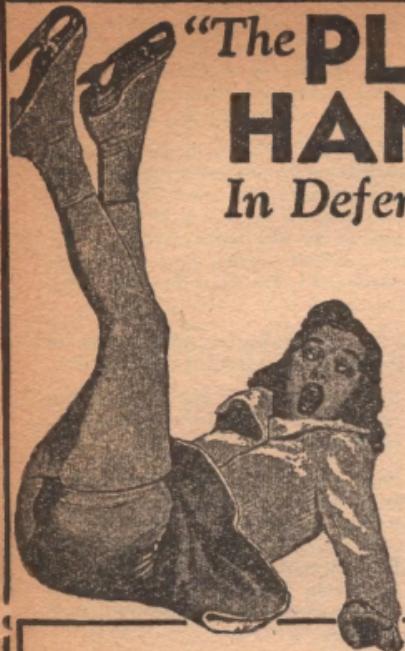
The Yarrows saw by the next day's papers that an entire colony of the creatures had been destroyed.

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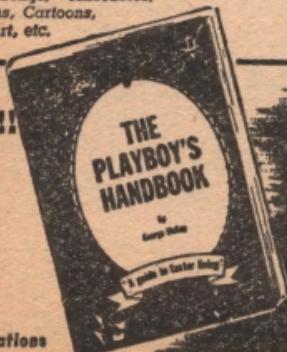
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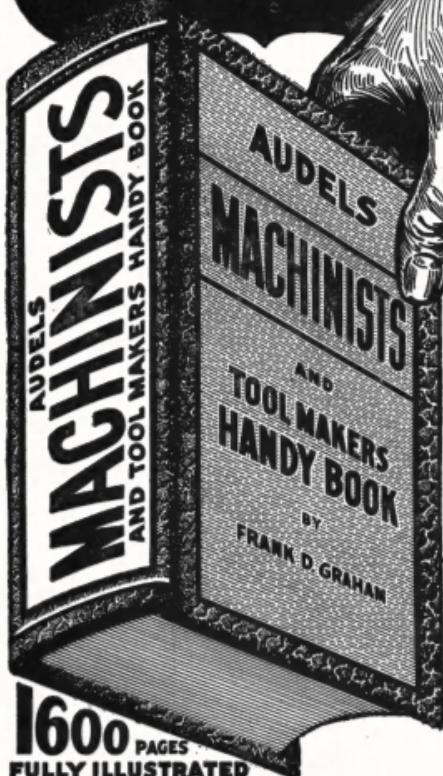
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